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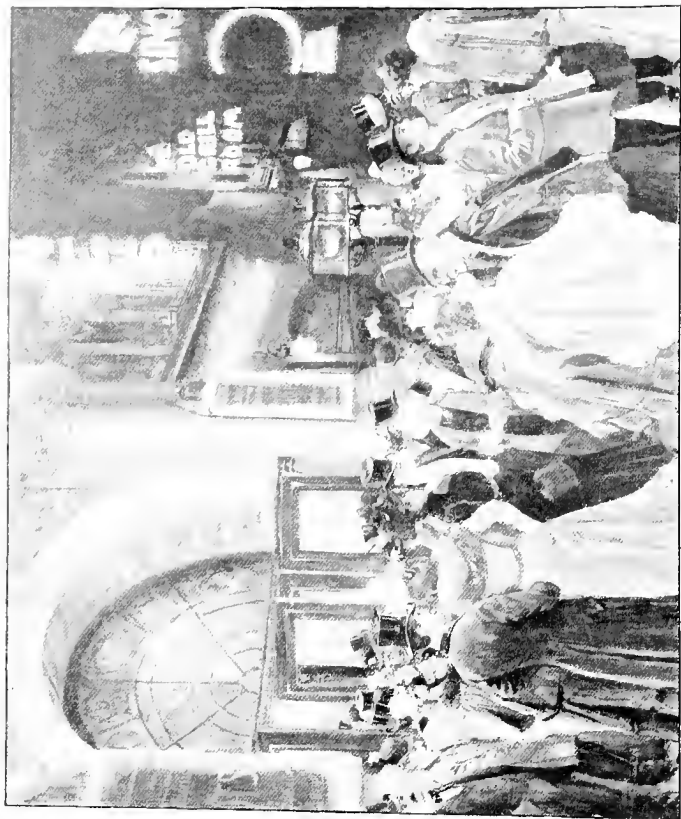




The Theatre and  
Its People.







AT THE ENTRANCE. *Front piece.*

# THE THEATRE AND ITS PEOPLE

BY

FRANKLIN FYLES

DRAMATIC CRITIC OF THE "NEW YORK SUN"

ILLUSTRATED

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## The Theatrical Millions



# The Theatre and Its People.

## I.

### THE THEATRICAL MILLIONS.

THERE are five thousand theatres in the United States if we count all kinds. More than two thousand are fairly classable as legitimate, and these range from the finest in a city to the poorest in a village. But all are in the routes of the travelling dramatic companies. Over one thousand more are devoted to vaudeville. The two thousand others taper off in various ways, but still they are theatres. To estimate the capital invested in all this theatrical property is

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difficult. Many of the theatres are portions of buildings devoted partly to other uses. But about \$100,000,000 is invested in the three thousand dramatic houses which will be considered in this book. That is an average of \$33,333 each, which is low enough. Hundreds are cheap wooden buildings, but they are offset by some that have cost as much as \$500,000 apiece. It is equally hard to compute the money paid by Americans for theatrical amusement. Separate audiences yield from absolutely nothing, in extreme cases of failure, to as much as \$20,000 at an exceptional performance of opera. A conservative calculation is that the aggregate reaches \$70,000,000 a year. Not less than one and a half million persons sit in these theatres each week-day night in the season of at least eight months. The publicity of this manufacture and sale of stage amusement is not accompanied by much of specific knowledge

on the subject. Dramatic art is widely and thoroughly discussed, and the average of taste and judgment concerning plays and acting is intelligent; but the natural curiosity as to the methods of the theatre and its people has been incited by fancies rather than satisfied by facts. Perhaps an account of the theatrical business and profession as pursued to-day in America, written neither to create nor destroy illusions, but to convey the truth in a plain manner, may be a gratification to its readers.



What a Theatre Is



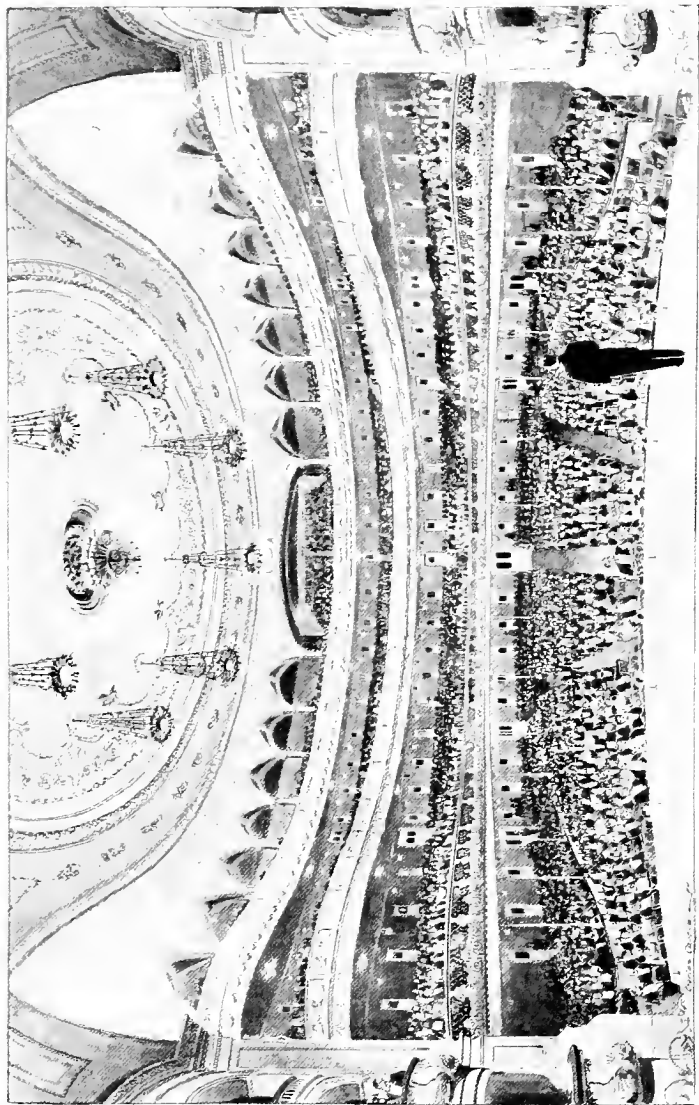
## II.

### WHAT A THEATRE IS.

A THEATRE is, of course, a place in which to see and hear plays. But this fact was not taken into full account by the earlier builder. He could not do so, even though he tried. He had to rest the balconies and roof on many pillars, which obscured the stage to those who sat behind them. The use of steel, instead of wood and cast-iron, now reduces these supports to a few slender posts set farther back. But formerly the theatrical architect disregarded the rules of sight and sound needlessly. Since then he has become a specialist. Give him a square plot of ground, so that the proportions need not be restricted, and he will erect on it a theatre

from every seat in which the performance may be viewed fully and comfortably. He will calculate the lines of vision so nicely that the persons farthest from the stage may see as well as the nearest. He will obey all the known laws of acoustics, too, but with less sureness, because waves of sound are erratic and echoes are whimsical. He cannot guarantee that there will not be spots in the auditorium from which the actors' voices cannot be heard perfectly, or others which those voices will reach twice through reverberation. Some of the handsomest theatres have these serious faults of sound, despite the utmost efforts that have been put forth in order to avoid or cure them.

The architect generally uses about one-third of the square plot for the stage and two-thirds for a wide and shallow auditorium. That places the largest feasible number of people close to the performance. He will so arrange the



Drawn by Charles Copeland.



inclines of the floors, the height of the stage, and the semicircles of seats that everybody faces the actors. Nobody will have to look up at them, nearly all will look down on them, and few will need to stretch their necks around posts. These essentials are now found in most of the new theatres throughout the country. They are easy to accomplish, unless the site is ill-shaped or the house an old one reconstructed. The galleries will be deep, with nearly straight fronts, to seat as many as possible advantageously. Of American houses devoted regularly to dramatic performances, the Boston Theatre has the greatest seating capacity—three thousand one hundred and seventy-two. If the building were modern, this number would be increased by another thousand. The smallest first-class theatre is the New York Lyceum, which holds seven hundred and twenty-seven in its chairs.

All theatres in the larger cities must

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now by law be fireproof in most of their construction. A solid brick wall must separate the stage from the auditorium, except for the necessary opening, and this must have a metal or asbestos curtain ready to lower at a moment's warning. There must be passages or balconies at the sides of the house large enough to hold all the occupants of the adjacent sections of seats. All aisles must be exactly proportionate to the seating capacity, and it is against the law to place extra chairs in them. All the lights must be shielded by glass or wire globes. A prescribed number of fire-extinguishers must be at hand. On each stage a fireman stays during every performance. Whether these and other regulations are obeyed or not depends upon the public officers whose duty it is to enforce them. Generally they are obeyed. Some of the older theatres are traps of death. Most of

the newer ones are models in which every peril of collapse or fire has a safeguard.

Comforts formerly undreamed of in theatres are now common. Finely furnished waiting-rooms invite the women, and smoking-rooms the men. Machines pump in iced air in summer, and radiate heat in winter. Ushers in uniforms and maids in caps and aprons are polite and attentive. Hats and wraps are taken care of free of charge. Water is passed to the audience between the acts. The shrewd manager studies the whims of the people whose money supports him. Sometimes he does odd things to catch their fancy. In two New York theatres the front dozen rows in the parquet are sofas for two persons each. The idea is that as most people go to the theatres in couples they will feel cosy and sociable if thus paired off. The modern manager has learned from

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the modern merchant that it is wise to be polite to the people whom he sells things to.

Look at the outside of a modern theatre and you will see that often the rear is much higher than the rest. This taller part contains the stage. Its shape is due to the fact that much of the scenery is hoisted straight up, instead of being moved aside, when the space below is required for another set. The proportions of the stage in one of the newer and better of the New York theatres may be taken as something like the standard. The height of the opening as seen by the audience is 39 feet, and the width is the same. The distance from the footlights to the rear wall is 58 feet, there being 3 feet between the footlights and the curtain. The side walls are 78 feet apart. The space above the stage opening is 33 feet in height, the distance from the top of the rigging loft to the floor being 72 feet.

Under the stage floor there is a space 16 feet in depth. This is enough room for the working of the traps through which actors and pieces of scenery sometimes appear or disappear. These openings are used for the popping up of a clown or a sprite into sudden view with a spiral spring, the impressive rise of a dignified apparition by means of an elevator, or the prosaic entrance of an ordinary individual up a stairway. There may be a dozen traps and movable sections. The extra height above the visible portion of the stage makes it possible to shift scenery without confusion or difficulty. The loft, with its ropes, pulleys, sparlike joists, and narrow bridges, looks like the rigging of a ship. This outfit is operated, whenever a change of scene is made in sight of the audience, in obedience to electric signals from the man in control of the performance. All save the walls of rooms is ordinarily lifted into the upper

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space, which should be equal in space to that part of the stage which the audience sees. The rest of the scenery is held in place by adjustable braces and clamps, instead of being fixed in the old-style grooves.

The lighting of the scenes has become a factor in stagecraft. It is done by gas or electricity, with limelight for a valuable adjunct. A switchboard with numerous buttons enables one man on the stage to control the electric lamps in all parts of the stage or auditorium. If gas is used, levers give him the same facility. Besides the row of lights across the front of the stage, the sides and top of the opening are lined with them. All these are shaded from the audience, but reflectors throw their glare on the stage when desired, and colored globes produce any hue that the scene demands. Not much scenery is kept in theatres, except where resident companies are employed. The equip-

ment of a play for a tour usually includes everything that the audience sees in it.

Money and ingenuity have been wasted in contriving odd stages. The late Charles Fechter put into a New York theatre a stage that had a semi-circular back and top, so that landscapes and skies might be more realistic. The same idea was later developed in huge cycloramic pictures shown in circular buildings, but it did not prove useful in plays. However, it is common now to mount an outdoor view on rollers like a panorama, and draw it around the back and sides of the stage without angles.

Some years ago the late Steele Mackaye ingeniously planned and constructed a two-story stage to lift and lower, so that one section might be used by the actors while the other was being set with the next scene. He expected that the intermissions between acts

would thus be practically abolished. Only a minute or two would be needed to change one stage for the other. But he had given no heed to the fact that it takes time for the actors to change their costumes. Even though the scenery might be in place, the toilettes of the actresses could not be ready so quickly. The only gain was that an elaborate scene could be built solidly on one stage, the movable ones being confined to the other. Mr. Mackaye, finding that he could not obviate the delay between the acts, next tried to occupy it with extra entertainment. In the next house built under his direction the curtain line was ten feet back from the edge of the stage. Into that space an ornamental structure was let down, and on it musicians played while the ensuing scene was being prepared. This exploitation of the orchestra required more and better bands than are commonly employed, and the result was not

thought to be worth the extra cost. But the ingenuity expended in the construction of stages has not usually been erratic or futile. It has been, in the main, practical and of much value to dramatic art.



## The Making of Actors



### III.

#### THE MAKING OF ACTORS.

WHERE do the actors come from? Some are of theatrical parentage. These began their stage life soon after birth. They may have made their dramatic entrances as infants in arms. They acquired familiarity with acting and more or less skill as they matured. This process has produced many fine artists and some geniuses, and it has also developed more numerous representatives of mediocrity. There used to be a prejudice among managers against any other training than that which was had in the theatre. The recruit from outside the ranks had to begin with the smallest parts and work along slowly

and unaided. Here and there a retired actor gave lessons to novices singly, but schools of acting were unknown. The conditions have changed within ten years. The majority of the new people in stageland are young men and women of education and refinement. They come from all kinds of families in the social scale.

Two girls made their *débuts* as sisters in a play. They had been chosen for their similarity in looks and manners. In reality, one was the orphan daughter of a stableman, and the other the heiress of a millionaire. A young actor in the same company was the grandson of a President of the United States, and a second was a beau from a purse-proud family. Both were university men. A third, the son of a rural clergyman, had worked as a waiter in an eating-house while preparing for the dramatic profession. But all these five were alike in being ladies or gentlemen in the best

sense of the term. They had been graduated from a dramatic school at the same time, and had obtained their first stage employment together in these minor parts of a play.

When once the prejudice of managers against school-trained actors was removed a change for the better began. Young people of good breeding, cultured minds, and artistic tastes have since made their way into the profession in larger numbers. That has improved the players' status. The schools range from a single teacher's to those with full staffs of professors. One may buy ten dollars' worth of instruction, and get it in an hour, or he may expend half as many thousands in a four-years' course. The schooling consists, to state it broadly, of elocution and pantomime. They are the important things. Acting is made up of speech and motion. The voice is first developed, next modulated, and finally adjusted to exact expression.

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The vocal exercises in a dramatic school consist at first of pronouncing and singing in concert. That is followed by individual practice to cure special faults. Fluent diction is at length striven for. The eyes of audiences must be appealed to quite as much as the ears. Every motion should convey a meaning. The system devised by Delsarte, a French expert, is commonly used, with modifications.

A class in dramatic expression is sometimes a funny sight. It may consist of a roomful of young men and women striking extravagant poses in unison and simultaneously making strange noises. Or they may be prostrating themselves on the floor, to lie there sprawling like swimmers and crying out like lunatics. They are practising a system of stage culture. A row of pupils making faces of love, hate, and other intense feelings, accompanied by highly emotional exclamations, is



A CLASS IN DRAMATIC EXPRESSION.



probably a more singular educational exhibit than can be found in any other process of learning. Some teachers make the pupils study and exercise their faces before mirrors, alone as well as in classes. Pictures of visages in all manner of grimace, from pleasure to anguish, are imitated in these practices of expression. The classical Greek masks are used as standards, but modern drawings are used, too, and good object-lessons are commonly found in the comic periodicals.

Pupils in dramatic schools are drilled in calisthenics, in dancing and in fencing, so that they may obtain a flexible command of themselves. While these things are going on lectures on dramatic literature are given and scenes from plays are enacted. Whenever the opportunity offers the pupils appear in a current play as characters who do not have to speak. They may be the silent guests in a drawing-room, the loungers

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in a public place, or appear in some other guise to people a scene. To form an excited mob is still better training, because then the pupils are taught to make outcries and to be very demonstrative in ways that mean something. But in these early public appearances they are not permitted to do at all as they please. Everything is minutely directed by the stage manager. One value in this experience is in getting used to an audience, though not in ceasing to be afraid of it. The oldest and best actors will tell you that hardly any one ever does that. But what is called stage fright is cured partly, at least, and the awkwardness of constraint is eased. The pupils get no other pay for this work. They are glad enough to do it for practice. Managers prefer them, not only on account of that, but also because they look and act better than the persons ordinarily hired for the same duties.

One of the exercises in a dramatic school is to speak picces as all of us did in our school-days. But the selections are not the well-remembered ones of our juvenile declamation. They are likelier to be passages from plays so unfamiliar that the pupil cannot be guided by precedent, but must form his own conception of the ideas and how to convey them in speech and action. The tendency is toward naturalism, and away from formal declamation. Oratory, in the ordinary meaning of the word, is depreciated. Fluency and variety of utterance are aimed at.

An effective way to test a student's pantomimic ability is to make him try to show without words, entirely by silent mimicry, something that he has seen in the street. Some of these representations are intelligible and others are devoid of apparent meaning. For instance, a girl enacted a mother who had lost her child. The eager search, the happy discovery,

the angry chastisement, and then the joyful hug were made so clear that language could not have told the story better. The next girl was less successful. The instructor in each case gave his judgment of what the pantomime meant. This time he said that he was uncertain, but probably the person portrayed was a beggar seeking alms. The almost tearful actress explained that it was a Salvation Army lass making an exhortation. Still more positive was the failure of a young fellow who seemed to be personating a murderer. It looked as though he hid warily, groped stealthily, and at length struck down his unsuspecting victim with some deadly weapon, hid the body in a bag and dragged it away. That was the idea that the teacher got. What the pupil had tried to show was a street sweeper at work.

Well along in the course of instruction the pupils make their first appear-



Photographic Drawing by L. L. Roush.

AT A ONE-NIGHT TOWN.



ances as semi-professional actors of parts more or less important. This occurs at an afternoon performance on the stage of a theatre before an invited audience. New short plays make up the programme, as a rule, and for two good reasons. If familiar pieces were used, the young actors would ape the old ones whom they had seen in the same rôles, and would (still worse) be judged by comparison. Managers attend these affairs, personally or by proxy, to pick out those who show real ability. Some of the single teachers produce equally good results, and their pupils get consideration. The schooled applicant is preferred nowadays to one who has had only haphazard practice on the stage and knows nothing of the principles of theatrical art.



## The Young Women



## IV.

### THE YOUNG WOMEN.

THE making of actresses is easier than the making of actors. The young women are by nature more apt and pliable. Their faces are more mobile, their manners more graceful, their habits of speech and bearing more variable. When the round-up of talent comes and the graduates are turned out for professional service, there are half a dozen proficient actresses to every actor of equal ability. This is shown at the *matinée* trial performances, in which the female rôles are generally well played, while the male ones are not. The superiority of the young women misleads some of them to let

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their vaulting ambition overleap itself. There was one actress, Mary Anderson, who was eminent from the very outset of her career. Gifted with a commanding type of personal beauty, powerful voice, and the mien of a born tragedy queen, she triumphed immediately over the crudities of a novice. She gained fame and fortune before she became, as she did eventually, a great artist.

That isolated example has misled many a stage-struck girl. She finds a teacher to flatter her vanity, deplete her purse, and coach her for a public appearance in some famous character. The cost of that single occasion, aside from her own training for it, amounts to \$1000 if she presents a play adequately in a first-class theatre. Not less than a week's salaries must be paid to her company to cover the time of rehearsing, and other things will raise the expenses just so far as she submits to being deluded. The upshot is usually

a fiasco. But she may have been drilled into a parrot-like kind of mediocrity. In one instance a novice was prepared by a retired actress to play a tragic rôle. She played in the manner of the teacher herself a quarter of a century ago. The impression made was almost that of genius. But the fair apple of praise was filled with the ashes of hope. The aspirant had acquired no facility save in that single part.

Honest dramatic instructors advise their pupils to seek success modestly and slowly. The young women meet, at this point, a difficulty arising from their superiority of sex. If promising actresses are more numerous six to one than actors, the same ratio operates in favor of the young men in getting work. A good-looking fellow finds himself in no such glutted market as discourages his sister aspirant. If he is clever, he will readily get an opening, even though he is ugly. The masculine rôles in

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plays predominate largely. Of comely, intelligent, and tolerably facile actresses, the supply is far in excess of the demand. That being so, there is no chance at all for those who have mistaken taste for talent, who have deluded themselves to believe that they can learn to act because they wish to, and for whom there can be nothing but disappointment. Genius that manifests itself ever so little is recognized at once. Mediocrity finds scant welcome. For incompetency there is no encouragement. The best graduates of the dramatic schools pass at once into regular employment. The rest seek it first by direct application to managers. The young woman's preference is one of the several stock companies with a vogue in New York and on their tours. Rarely can she get into the presence of the manager. She has to tell her errand to some subordinate. If she shows a combination of beauty, brains, and train-

ing, she may be put on the waiting list. Her name and address are taken down. There is a chance that she will be sent for whenever somebody like her is needed for a small part. In such instances the manager himself may listen to a recitation. Eventually she may make her appearance in a small rôle. But her start is likelier to be made with some minor travelling company, with a hard initial experience of a tour of one-night towns.

Advancement is sometimes rapid on the stage, but oftener it is slow. It can hardly ever be gained without earning it. This was not always so. It is not many years since a young woman might make beauty and money serve her purpose of stage exploitation, even though her talent was scant. Managers were at hand to put her forward while her capital lasted, and during that time, usually brief, she figured conspicuously, if not illustriously. But the business

methods of the theatres have been changed radically for the better. The houses of the first class are no longer open to vain and false pretenders. The aim is to provide the best performances of the various kinds. Not all of the kinds are praiseworthy, but none of them is now meant to include inability. Experiments are carefully calculated, and those that fail are quickly abandoned. It is quite impossible, under the present conditions, for an actress to obtain even a transitory semblance of unmerited success. Even if she deserves it, she has to earn about all she gets of fame. She must learn to labor and to wait.

Sometimes it is necessary to provide quick substitutes for absent actors. The minor members of the company are prepared to assume more important rôles at brief notice. Thus the girl whom you see enacting a lowly servant to a lofty lady is ready to go from calico

into satin in a jiffy, and lift her voice from the humility of "May I?" to the insolence of "You must!" Even though her heart may sicken with hope deferred, she is benefited by "under-studying." She has to go through a course of rehearsing. While she may never play the part in public with the stock company, she may be assigned to it when the piece is sent off on a tour with other performers. The system of under-study is general. Sometimes a young and new actress is engaged for a small part with the promise that, besides the possibility of an emergency call to a better one, she shall surely have it if the success of the piece warrant a second and cheaper company for a round of the smaller cities.

The irksomeness is not less if while waiting for a better part the girl has to efface her youth or beauty. In private life she may be a belle with every natural charm enhanced by fine toilettes.

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But before the friends who go to see her on the stage she may have to wear the rags of a beggar or the garish garb of a parvenu. All the women in a play cannot be good in looks or conduct. The most gracious daughter of refinement may have to be repellent in her mimic character.

The daughter of a wealthy and modish family desired to become an actress. She was young, beautiful, and ambitious. She had several interviews with a dramatic manager.

“You have the right personality for a small part in a piece I am going to bring out,” he said. “It is that of a lady accustomed to the most refined society.”

“My mother is ‘at home’ Thursday afternoons,” the girl replied. “You will receive her card. Will you devote an hour to observing me there?”

The manager consented. He found

that she was, as he had expected her to be, a graceful, gracious belle among the modish guests. He told her that if she would try to preserve the same manner at the reception in the play, he would take the risk of engaging her.

“And now I have something to ask of you,” she said. “It would not be hard for me, I think, to behave exactly as I do here; only, would I feel the same in the kind of drawing-room you would place me in? You comprehend?”

“Yes,” the manager replied. “You mean that you would miss the beauty and luxury of this apartment. Everything here is in taste, even to the smallest touch of color and detail of arrangement. This end of the room is just what I want for the scene in the play. If your mother will give me the facilities for my artists I will reproduce it faithfully. Oh, don’t thank me! I’ll do it simply to save time and expense

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in designing. You shall have no excuse, in case you are awkward, of not 'feeling at home.' "

The manager kept his promise. The drawing-room in the play duplicated a section of the one in Fifth Avenue, and was not less costly so far as it went. And the girl? Well, the open end of the room was toward a public audience, and that scared away her fine air. She was absolutely awkward on the first night, and it was not until after a week's experience that she was able to speak her dozen lines like an accomplished lady, or even stand in graceful postures which had been quite artless in private life.

Looking for Work



## V.

### LOOKING FOR WORK.

ALMOST all the dramatic companies, whether meant for location or travel, are made up in New York City. The work is done chiefly through agents, some of whom are women. The trustworthy ones serve responsible managers and capable actors. The fee for an engagement is half the first week's salary. The employer pays nothing. The agent keeps a registry of all applicants who have had experience on the stage. In some cases, not usually, he will put amateurs on the list. Those who come from good teachers get attention. As a rule, however, he will not bother with other than professionals of whose abili-

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ties he has a pretty definite knowledge. Scant heed is given to applicants who have not shown proficiency. Amateur experience is not respected. Assertion of ability avails naught. A prepossessing appearance counts. But even those who have reason to be vain in that respect are likely to be told that their good looks would disappear on the stage. The idea that the footlights always enhance beauty is a mistake. The effect is quite as often the other way. Natural color counts for nothing. The person with a fine complexion but irregular features may look ill-favored. The face of an actress depends on the shape of the features and their mobility. It is hard for even an expert to foretell how anybody will appear under such conditions. Nor is beauty a paramount consideration, even with actresses, although it is a great factor. Talent is the first consideration.

When a manager has settled on a new

play for production he first studies the characters closely and then seeks their counterparts in looks, voices, and manners. Versatility is rare, and the manager is not concerned in developing it. He is a dealer in talent rather than a cultivator of it. His ventures are sufficiently uncertain without increasing the risks needlessly. In exceptional cases he will save a salary by taking an untried beginner willing to work without pay. But that is regarded generally as a penny wise and pound foolish thing to do, and when done it is apt to be due to a belief that the anxious novice is really capable. In the ordinary process the manager tells the agent just what is wanted for the cast of the play in hand. Together they fix upon one or more suitable actors for each rôle. The manager may submit the names of those whom he has in mind. The agent may recommend others. In either case the agent knows pretty

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nearly, or will speedily find out, whether the desired persons are disengaged and the pay which they will ask or accept. But the bargain has to be concluded by the manager and the actor, with the agent as a harmonizing medium.

Managers on their tours are alert for talent. All along the routes of the travelling companies are boys and girls who speak pieces to the delight of coddling communities, and adult elocutionists who are encouraged by a larger public. These persons are prone to believe that they were born for a theatrical career. The argument against these aspirants is that they have become so fixed in the method of a reciter that they cannot, in these times of colloquial speech and easy deportment on the stage, enact a character in the natural manner required by advanced stagecraft. That is a just and true theory, but its indiscriminate application keeps

a large amount of talent out of the theatre. Those elocutionists who can make an audience weep or laugh are surely possessed of essential qualifications for acting. They probably have good voices, trained to expressive diction, and they may have developed facility in mimicry. In either case they have the makings of a player, always provided that they are young enough to be still ductile for further development, and that some physical defect does not nullify the advantage. Many have risen from the platform to the stage by retaining all their vocal merits of fluency and flexibility, and getting rid of grandiloquence and all the mannerisms of oracular declamation. Those who are mimics must learn to assimilate their abilities with the other requirements of a play before they can become valuable on the dramatic stage. The acting forces of the theatres might well be recruited more

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freely than they are from the young elocutionists of the country—those who were born with uncommonly good vocal organs, and have learned how to use them well enough to entertain their friends and neighbors. These effective speakers have made a long start toward acceptable acting, and it is a mistake of some managers to taboo them carelessly.

Many aspirants to the stage write to managers for employment, telling what they have done, what they believe they can do, and perhaps sending printed praise from the home newspapers. Hardly ever do they get any encouraging responses, and usually they receive none at all. That is as well in most cases. Only the possessors of exceptional qualities should be helped to go on the stage. Most of those who write earnestly of their determination to become actors, and who dwell particularly on their ideals and ambitions, mistake the desire for the ability. It

must be borne in mind that acting depends less on mind than on matter—that is to say, while a fine brain is highly desirable in a player, it need not be of unusual quality to enable him to do satisfactory service. The playwright and the stage manager do most of the thinking for him, and few of our performers, even those of eminence, are under much of an intellectual strain.

For these reasons the managers cannot assume that the stage-struck writers of eloquent letters, no matter what they urge in favor of employment, really possess the gifts of nature to warrant their efforts to get behind the footlights. Those gifts are physical. The best of them are comeliness and a strong voice. No ugly girl should ever think of a theatrical career, and the boy who is not good-looking can hope for availability in no other than grotesque rôles. But beauty alone will not serve the purpose. A Venus who lisps or an Adonis who

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stammers are of no use in the drama. Strenuous applicants with impediments of speech are not uncommon, while those with weak vocal cords, unshapely forms, homely faces, and generally graceless personalities are surprisingly plenty. Any one of these things should keep its owner away from the stage door. But if nature has been kind to any young elocutionist or amateur actor in these respects, and has besides given a faculty of sympathetic expression—what is sometimes called temperament, or magnetism—only then it may be worth while to persevere. If endowed with those rare merits, no young man or woman need show the evidence to many managers before finding a place for them. They are too rare to be thrown aside when found.

Salaries vary with circumstances. The manager may find at \$25 a week a player whose moderate talent exactly fits a part of considerable importance.

He may have to pay \$150 if the rôle is singular and fit candidates scarce. If he wants celebrity in addition to ability, he may be willing to make the salary \$500 a week. In that case he takes into account the public value of the name, and makes a feature of it in his advertisements. Not more than ten actors in America, aside from the stars, receive as much as \$250 a week, and not more than five actresses are paid this amount. In fact, \$150 a week is exceptional, and \$100 will engage an excellent hero or heroine, a fine comedian, or a delineator of eccentric character. The wages run down to \$75 for a soubrette, ingénue, or old man, to \$50 for an old woman, juvenile man, or juvenile woman, and so along to utility and chorus men and women at \$12 to \$18 per week. Those are the wages of thoroughly competent actors in companies of good grade. The figures may be lowered under other circumstances

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nearly to nothing. Engagements are made for the run of a play if it is a new one, or for the season of thirty to forty weeks if it is an old one. Written contracts are usual, but not invariable. Unless there is a proviso to the contrary, either party may terminate the engagement on two weeks' notice. Some actors, however, are able to stipulate for entire seasons. In such cases the managers reserve the right to transfer their services at pleasure.

Young actors are not averse to enacting old characters. Some of the best of the aged men in the plays are hardly more than youths in fact. A deceiving counterfeit of extreme age is preferable to genuineness. The younger actor has more strength of voice and vigor of action, and thus may put desirable force into a semblance of decrepitude. But old women are seldom personated on the stage by young women. Actresses of forty to fifty are abundant and cheap.

The feminine voice, unlike the masculine, is not adaptable to a simulation of age. Besides those reasons, there is a more potent one. Actresses remember that "a woman is as old as she looks." They dislike to age in the public eye before their time. Managers have more trouble with the matron of a play than with any other personage. Sometimes such a rôle is important, and an actress in her prime is needed. But one who is forty, or even more, may as yet have played maidens and young wives only. She will hold out to the last against figuring as the parent of a strapping hero.

"I will play the daughter in this piece for \$100 a week, but not the mother for \$200," was the way a well-known actress put it. "I can look as young as thirty, but if once I made myself as old as fifty, the public would never believe that I have just turned forty, which is the fact."

Another actress rejected the part of a hero's mother, though the manager assured her that she need not add to her own age in appearance. "But who is to play the son?" An actor was named. "Why, he is as old as I am," she cried. "I might consent to be a mother to a minor, but to one who may have voted for half a dozen Presidents, never!"

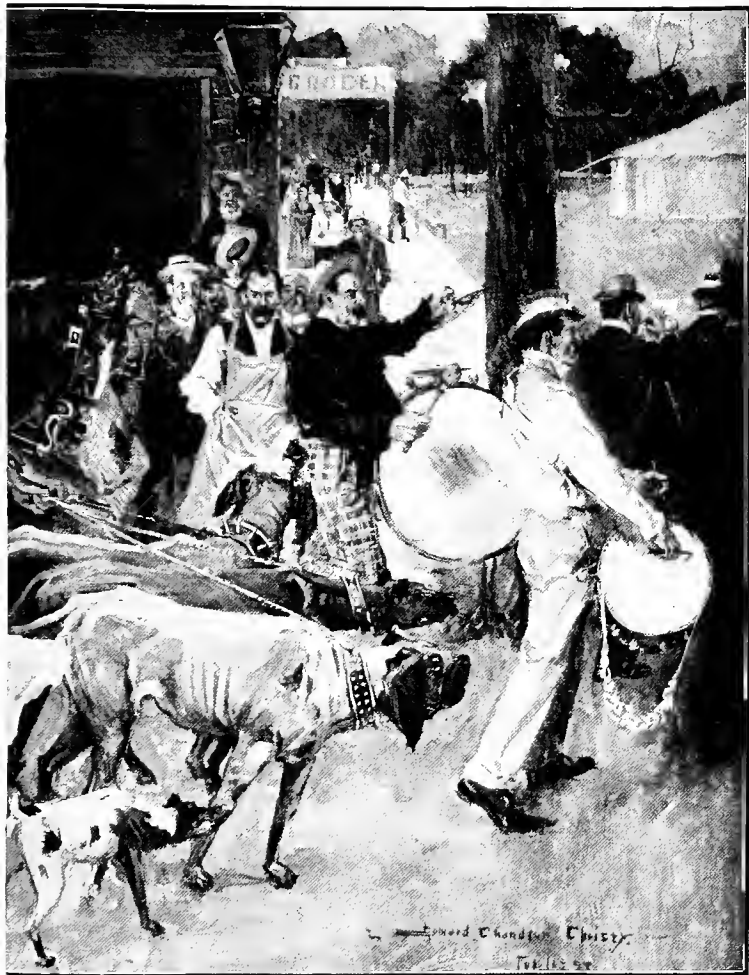
A young married couple desired to go on the stage together. They had made each other's acquaintance as amateur actors. Together they had prepared for the dramatic profession. They meant that their first theatrical tour should also be their honeymoon. They went to one agency after another in vain. At length they applied at a place where cheap companies are made up. The bridegroom was brusquely asked what musical instrument he played. He said, in reply, that he could thrum a piano a little.

"That won't do," the agent re-





"UNCLE TOM'S CABIN"



ON PARADE.



marked; "I'm hiring 'Uncle Tomers.' I guess the lady could do 'Eliza' all right. I was thinking of you for 'George Harris,' but you'd have to double brass."

The offer had to be explained to these novices. The bride could have an engagement to play "Eliza" in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" at \$30 a week. She would have to ride a horse in the street parade in each village visited. The bridegroom could get \$40 a week to enact "George Harris" on the stage and blow a brass instrument in the daily procession, as well as outside the theatre just before every performance. That is termed "Uncle Toming." There are never less than twenty companies engaged in it. Half of these perform in tents. Indeed, the "Uncle Tomers" of this latter sort stand for all that is left of old-time vagabondism in stageland. They are the shadows and echoes of those strolling players

who long ago were classed with the vagrants. Some of them travel in wagons, and eat and sleep under the same canvas which forms their theatre. Besides the horses which draw their vehicles, they are accompanied by bloodhounds to chase "Eliza" in the play. They pitch their tent in villages too small to have a theatre. A county fair affords the chance to give a side show. The party is composed, often, of one or two families. The members may get no regular wages, and live like a miniature community. This is the crudest phase of dramatic employment, and there is not much of it.

The life of the people of the stage in general is not hard, coarse, nor unconventional. The evils and vicissitudes are much exaggerated by common report. The work in these days is usually easy. Members of the low-priced stock companies are the only ones overtaxed. When a play lasts an

entire season in New York, as often happens, the actors have little studying to do. Rehearsals are held only once in a while to correct carelessness. The day's labor consists of three to four hours' work only, except when matinées double the time. Even when on duty at the theatre the real exertion in acting by each individual is on the average confined to about half an hour in each representation of a play, taking the short parts into account along with the long ones. Most companies on tours spend half the season in engagements of whole weeks or longer in the big cities. In a sense, they are homeless. But they need not be without sociability. There is congenial companionship among themselves. The majority are ladies and gentlemen in breeding and conduct, and these need not associate with those who are not. As the status of the players has improved with the dominance of education and refine-

ment in the profession, courtesies from the worthiest people have increased very much. Prejudice against the theatre is no longer indiscriminate. The hardships of travel are not great nowadays. Even when night-by-night journeys are made by travelling companies the distances are short and sleeping-cars are comfortable. There is leisure in the daytime to enjoy the sights quite as pleasure tourists do. The sun shines in stageland as much as it does elsewhere, and the clouds are no bigger nor blacker.

## The Theatrical Man of Business



## VI.

### THE THEATRICAL MAN OF BUSINESS.

THE theatrical manager in former times was a good deal of a humbug. He posed as a patron of dramatic art. He wore much velvet and fur on his coat, the brim of his high hat was wide, and he stood at the portal of the theatre with one hand in his breast and the other behind him. Those hands were usually empty, and so were his pockets. He paid his debts when he could and had to. He felt no more bound by his pompous promises to the public than he did by those he made recklessly to his employés. He is still to be found, but he is no longer typical of the business. He has been displaced by a man with

the methods of a merchant, who finds out what will sell, commands sufficient capital to produce the salable matter, and is as trustworthy and responsible as the average dealer in wares. He may have a pride of character which will not permit him to appeal to vicious tastes, and in that case he promotes what is seemly in dramatic literature, though taking care that it shall be at the same time likely to comply with a remunerative demand. He will invest thousands of dollars in enterprises where his predecessor would not put hundreds. He is a fostering and inspiring supporter of the histrionic arts, and none the less so because he is after a pecuniary reward. At the other extreme of stage diversion he may be shameless as to the kind he provides, notwithstanding that he is still circumspect in his money dealings. He may not be averse to wallowing in the mire, but with his fouled fingers he will pay

the last cent he owes. It is the exceptional manager nowadays who does not conduct his affairs as equitably as the average that obtains in any other line of purchase and sale. But his business is more precarious. The risks of loss are in a heavy ratio to the chances of gain, even though he be shrewd, careful, and judicious.

The theatrical manager calculates all he can and guesses at the rest. Hardly anything in his plans can be depended on. The taste of the public is variable, and it grows more and more independent. Only thirty-five years ago New York had a single theatre to which fashionable people went habitually. Later there were two, then three, and to-day there is not one with a blind following, if we except the Metropolitan Opera House, with its operatic vogue so potent that even its top gallery is occupied by stylish folk. Success or failure depends on the entertainment,

not the house. It used to be an exploit when a lady went to a variety performance. What is called "continuous vaudeville" has come into favor with polite people, especially in the large cities. It is made up of songs, dances, monologues, and other specialties. But they are almost altogether wholesome, and to them short plays are added. Legitimate actors were at first averse to these theatres, but eminent artists now take such engagements readily. It is not so at the music halls. There the programmes contain indecorous things, and the men in the audience smoke at will. The distinction between the "continuous" vaudeville theatre and the music hall is wide. The supporters of all kinds of theatres have learned to discriminate. The manager who produces new plays studies the drifts and vagaries of popularity as closely as he can.

Concentration of interests among



Drawn by F. C. Yohn.

LOOKING ON THE STAGE FROM THE UPPER GALLERY  
IN THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, NEW YORK.



managers has marked the growth of the theatrical business in recent years. This began with combinations by which the theatres in towns along one railway made their bargains collectively with the visiting companies, thus doing away with needless dicker separately. This system was soon extended to the formation of longer circuits, and later to those which took in large sections of the country. Formerly the travelling manager had to exchange letters with each resident manager, in order to arrange consecutive dates for a route and agree upon terms of rental, or of sharing the receipts. That was a slow and bothersome part of the business. Now the time of most of the theatres is placed at the disposal of some one of the numerous agencies in New York, and the routes are made under a simpler and safer system. The journeys are so laid out as to take in the cities in close and regular order, so as to waste no time

or money in needless travel. This preliminary work is done months beforehand, and, although the itinerary is subject to minor changes, it holds good generally.

The command of ample capital has led to syndicates, or trusts, in the theatrical, as in other businesses, and these are assailed and defended in the same way that the subject is discussed in its relation to entirely commercial affairs. These combinations are numerous in the various fields of stage amusements, but the biggest of them is one which controls almost absolutely the theatres of the highest grade in the larger cities throughout the whole United States. It is composed of six men, who, by ownership, lease, or other arrangement, have acquired the mastery of nearly all the theatres in which the highest prices of admission are charged, and in which the highest grade of performances are given. It is a virtual monopoly, and

some outcry has been made against it, but it has been beneficial to the stage in various ways. It has brought about affiliations conducive to material and artistic progress. Under its operations contracts are enforced, larger salaries are paid to actors with certainty, playwrights are encouraged and amply remunerated, and the traffic in the drama has been lifted from suspicion into esteem. The tastes of that portion of the public which demands good art in the theatre are satisfied in a larger degree than formerly, and, despite the application of this costlier and more skilful stagecraft to some regrettable plays, the standard of morality has been raised along with the other advancement.

It is by serving the interests of the star actors that the chief of the syndicates maintains its supremacy. This it does by assuring a continuous route of thirty to forty weeks each season,

with the usual share of the gross receipts, and a relief from all the cares and risks of making out an itinerary. The important "stars," with only few exceptions, are affiliated with this syndicate, and it arranges the tours of nearly every successful play suitable for theatres of the first class. Minor syndicates operate similarly with the control of cheaper-price theatres, both in dramatic and vaudeville performances, and by such systemization the theatrical business has arrived at a commercial respectability, which it did not enjoy a quarter of a century ago.

Perhaps the reader will like to know about free tickets to the theatres generally. They are few or many, according to circumstances. Two are sent to each newspaper critic whenever a new play is brought out, and for Monday nights anyway in theatres where the bill is changed weekly. His further supply depends on his rule for or against ask-

ing for or using such favors. Most critics, while accepting the hospitality of the managers personally, will not go beyond that. At least two of the New York daily journals prohibit "dead-heading" altogether, except by a person who is to write about the performance. Others of equal importance are less sensitive or finicky. There have been instances of a critic buying every seat he sat in, but it was construed as antagonism to the stage, instead of dignity.

Tickets are used instead of cash in paying for advertising space on street walls and in store windows. For each billboard of the ordinary size and for a bill or picture in a window two tickets a week are given. These are good on presentation for two seats in the best or poorer part of the house, according to the value of the advertising space secured. Sometimes mere admission to the gallery suffices. In other cases prescribed chairs in the parquet are neces-

sary. The bargain is that such tickets shall be used by the recipients only ; but the practice is to sell them cheaply to dealers, who, in turn, dispose of them at cut rates, as "scalpers" do with railway tickets. In the big cities, when spacious displays of posters are made in places where crowds will see them, tickets alone will not suffice, and cash has to be paid. As to the distribution of tickets broadcast, or "papering the house," in order to get an audience, it is done if an entertainment fails and few will pay to see it. In the smaller cities certain officials sometimes expect free entrance, and in exceptional cases it is required by ordinance. It is the general rule to admit actors without charge if there is room for them. But if a play is successful enough to draw a houseful of cash people, the manager, as a matter of course, cuts the free list very short. He is a more independent business man than he used to be.

A theatrical manager, now prosperous, was encountered as he alighted at a meal station on a transcontinental railway. "I take my meals in my private car," he said, "and I am getting a lot of pleasure by the sight of a place where I can eat, but don't want to, because I once wanted to, and couldn't. I am making the trip now in a car exclusive to myself and attendants. I do it to gratify a whim. Sixteen years ago I was out here in this country with a losing company. We got into a certain town just in time to give an evening performance, and were to resume our journey next morning. The receipts were small, and I divided them among the actors, so they would be able to settle for lodgings and breakfasts, but in buying three cigars for a quarter, I discovered that it broke into the only dollar left in my pocket. Transportation had been paid for at the start on this railroad, and I hoped to

make a profit at our next night's stand, but in the meanwhile where was I to sleep? I was too proud to confess my impecuniosity by borrowing from any of my actors. Then I bethought myself of a free pass which had been given to me as manager, and on which I was entitled to ride to and fro at my pleasure. It didn't include a berth in a sleeper, but with it I could spend the night in a car seat.

"I dozed and tried to draw consolation from my three cigars till about four o'clock in the morning. Then I changed to a train going back. It stopped at this same meal station for breakfast. I was ravenously hungry. The breakfast smelled good and looked good, but its price was seventy-five cents, or exactly all I had. I dared not leave myself without a cent for the smallest incidentals during the day. There was no lunch counter at which I could buy a snack. Not even a cup of

coffee was on sale separate from the meal. I was ashamed to ask that an exception be made in my case. So I had to take my appetite back into the car, without so much as a cigar left for solace, and wait till I reached the town to buy a twenty-five cent breakfast at a cheap restaurant. That is why I am enjoying my trip over the same line in a hotel car all to myself, and take joy in smiling disdainfully at this particular meal station."



Ways and Means and  
Uncertainties.



## VII.

### WAYS AND MEANS AND UNCERTAINTIES.

THE rewards of success on the stage are liberal. They are won only by providing real entertainment of some sort. The favorite actor grows slowly into favor, as a rule, but there are exceptions; and a strong play with a fitting rôle may carry him into celebrity at once. Managers are ever on the alert to find some one of whom a star may be made. When one is chosen for that purpose a contract is made with him for a term of years, usually five. The actor receives the salary he has been accustomed to, and also a share of the profits, increasing from as little as ten per cent. the first year to as much as fifty the last. As a rule, the manager chooses the plays, forms the supporting

company, and conducts the business as he pleases.

If the manager is putting forward a star who will appeal to the better grade of audiences, his methods of exploitation will be dignified, yet he will neglect nothing to arouse seemly interest—that is, he will seek space in the newspapers by having the actors address literary bodies, discuss questions of dramatic art with reporters, and do other things to catch intellectual attention. But the end aimed at cannot be gained unless the star gives the money's worth of entertainment to his audiences. A place in popularity is seldom lost while its possessor remains on the stage with his faculties unimpaired. If he has not been brought forward by a manager with whom he must share profits, his income may be very large. Joseph Jefferson gets never less than seventy-five per cent. of the gross receipts, sometimes ninety, and he fre-

quently rents a theatre outright. In one New York engagement takings were \$14,476 in a week, being limited to that by the size of the theatre. Probably his expenses were \$5000, and certainly not over that sum. Mr. Jefferson and some others of the prosperous stars are served in their material affairs by men on salaries, or who receive a small percentage of the profits, but a majority are in business partnership with their managers. In the recent instances of two young actresses taken up for exploitation as stars the manager of each assumed all the responsibilities and agreed to pay the same salary which she had been receiving, besides a share of the profits. Good luck attended the ventures in the forms of successful plays, and each actress had an income of \$1000 to \$1500 week after week during the first season, with almost a certainty of continuance, until a large fortune is accumulated. But these are exceptional

cases. Many a starring actor gets no more income than he would in salaried employment, or even less, and the venture may yield him nothing in either money or celebrity.

The star actor used to travel alone and perform with resident companies. He sent copies of his plays ahead, marked with directions to enable the stage manager to assign the rôles and conduct the rehearsals. Sometimes he was preceded by his own expert to insure better preparation. If his repertory were familiar, the support was tolerable; in new pieces it was usually grievous. This led to the organization of travelling companies, and they soon filled the whole field. The salary list of a play foots up \$2000 a week sometimes, but not often. It is seldom more than \$1500, oftener below \$1000, and frequently not more than \$500. The amount depends on the grade of the theatres to be included in the itinerary.



Drawn by Alice Barber Stephens.

A STAR ACTRESS IN HER DRESSING-ROOM.



The manager invests from possibly \$25,000 in the first placing of the play before the public to as little as \$250 in case he buys an outfit already long in service. He pays to the author or owner of the piece a royalty which may amount to \$1000 a week or drop as low as \$50. He may find one for which he has to pay nothing at all.

The cost of producing a play is extremely variable. When an old one is brought out for a single week by a resident company, with no new scenery nor costumes, hardly any outlay is required beyond the running expenses of the theatre. But if it is new and prepared elaborately, \$25,000 may be paid out before the curtain is raised for the first performance. Serious dramas and comic operas, with many sets of scenery and costumes, mean heavy outlays. But the sum hardly ever exceeds \$20,000, and oftener is under \$12,000. Of this the author has had \$1000 or more

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in advance. As much has been paid to a stage manager, who directs all the preparations at a fixed price for the job. Designers of costumes and scenery and composers of incidental music have received \$1000 more. As much as \$1000 has been used up in a stock of bills to be displayed in the streets or in windows. The rest of the money has been used up in the making of dresses and scenery. The actors are not paid for rehearsing.

It is the rule that the performers shall provide their wigs, hosiery, and shoes in all plays, and the entire costumes in case they are in the fashion of the present time. But the manager helps the actresses out when he desires them to wear very fine gowns. If the play has a lot of fashionable women among its characters, and they are introduced at balls or receptions, he meets most of the cost of dressing them. An odd dispute over an actress's gown was

all but taken into court lately. At an afternoon reception in a play she wore an elegant gown. The manager had made an allowance to her of \$300 for that and several other toilettes. She had expended \$100 of her own money in addition. The question to whom this wardrobe belonged was raised when she put on the calling costume to go to a real function. She pleaded as an excuse that it was greatly admired by a crowd of women in modish society, and thereby brought them to the theatre to see it in the play. But the manager would not take that view of the matter. He declared that he would, if necessary, obtain an injunction restraining her from wearing outside the theatre the gown which he and she owned jointly.

The commonest division of the box-office receipts between the theatre and the entertainment is half and half, but there are entertainments that can get eighty per cent. in some theatres, and

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there are theatres that can get eighty per cent. from some entertainments. The expenses of a tour are anywhere between \$1000 and \$4000 a week. The income varies still more widely. The travelling manager pays the railway fares, but the actors have to board and lodge themselves. The law now forbids railway officials to discriminate in favor of any persons in fixing rates, and it is obeyed to the letter in New England, where the full fare of two cents a mile is exacted. The rule restricting free baggage to one hundred and fifty pounds for each person is never suspended. A charge of twenty-five cents a mile is made for the distance that each extra car containing scenery is hauled. In the Middle States some concessions are permitted by the transportation agents of the trunk lines. A car for baggage and scenery is provided free for each company of not less than twenty-five persons. Excursion rates

are applied whenever it can be done reasonably. In the West and South the manager can usually make private contracts, under which he pays no more than a cent and a half a mile for each person, and nothing for a baggage car.

Here is a transcript from a manager's book, showing every item of expense in a fairly illustrative week:

Salaries, . . . . .	\$1,418.00
Railway fares New York to Baltimore, . . . . .	89.25
Hauling baggage and scenery, . . . . .	40.00
Printing account (posters and window bills), . . . . .	173.05
Half of extra newspaper advertising, . . . . .	67.65
Calcium lights and attendants, . . . . .	65.00
Express charges on printing, . . . . .	12.98
Lumber, hardware, etc., . . . . .	5.35
Typewriting, . . . . .	5.00
Properties (small articles used in the performance), . . . . .	9.35
Telegrams and incidentals of advertising agent, . . . . .	7.42
Supernumeraries (two girls hired for silent figures), . . . . .	14.00
Circulars, cards, etc., . . . . .	4.45
Expenses in New York office, . . . . .	16.00
Royalty to author, . . . . .	334.44
Total week's expenses, . . . . .	<u>\$2,261.94</u>

It is useless to give figures relating to theatrical profits. The circumstances alter the cases tremendously. In the instance cited the travelling manager cleared \$824. No doubt the local manager made nearly as much. Within ten years in this country not less than ten plays have cleared as much as \$100,000 apiece for their managers and half as much for their authors, while hundreds have been utter fiascos, and thousands have ranged all the way between those extremes of success and failure. One piece in New York City drew \$968 on its first night and only \$41 three nights later, because it raised expectations and disappointed them. The same man's next venture crowded a big theatre during four months, and gave a clear profit of over \$100,000 in that time. In one case he had not been able to fill the house by giving away free tickets. In the other he refused them to hundreds of applicants. Per-

formances without a single paying auditor have usually been caused by storms or something else outside the house, but at least one took place on a pleasant night in New York. Only sixty-seven persons were present, and not one had paid for admission. It is said that the aggregate sum of money received by theatrical managers is equalled by that which they expend. The losses balance the profits.

However, the theatrical business usually puts on a bright front, no matter what gloom may be thus hidden. The men concerned in it are generally cheerful losers. The old-fashioned mock-dignity has given way to urbanity in the treatment of the public as a part of the newer methods. This is shown at the ticket window. Formerly the salesman hid behind ground glass, and the purchaser knew him only by his voice, which was gruff, and his language, which was impolite. Communication

was had with him through a small aperture, into which money had to be thrust trustfully. The impression given was that the man inside was ashamed of his employment, or else a rogue, who did not intend that his victim should ever identify him. The method and aspect of the theatrical treasurer is admirably reformed, except in scarce cases. He sits behind a wide-open window, and on the counter in front of him diagrams show the place of every seat in the house, while behind him in a rack are exposed the tickets for a week ahead or longer. He gives pleasant and explicit answers to all questions, no matter how many or silly they may be, and to women especially he is as urbane and patient as any clerk in a store.

Women behave here just about as they do when shopping. They first demand to know what seats are to be had in the various parts of the house and the prices thereof. A selection is

often a matter of the slowest imaginable consideration, even though it keeps a line of persons waiting. Nor is a decision arrived at by means of dialogue and diagram. Very often the perplexed feminine mind requires to be centred on the actual tickets, which she examines as though they were fabrics, the color or size of which had something to do with their value. After all this examination and hesitation she goes off without buying, in order to see what is to be had at other theatres. It is not until the point is reached of selling tickets on approval, to be returned if not wanted, that the traffic becomes less obliging than that of the modern department store, and even then the man refuses smilingly, notwithstanding the woman's manifest opinion that he is a mean old thing. However, he is sometimes willing that she shall try the seat before buying.

“The chairs in this theatre are so

narrow that they just fairly torture me," said a woman who carried much weight.

"Oh, you're thinking of some other house," the urbane man protested. "Jim, show this lady to parquet chair 21A. Try it for yourself, ma'am."

The woman did so, and made the purchase, with the final remark to the same chap whom her predecessor in line had regarded as a mean old thing! "It was awfully nice of you—thank you so much."

After going through the process so far as deciding for herself is concerned, a woman may take up the separate and sometimes curiously complicated question of some absent person's requirements. "My husband is coming with me," she may say, "and he can't bear to see me cry. There isn't anything in this play to cry about—is there?"

"No," the man may assure her; "there isn't a tear in it."

“My husband is rather nervous, you know, and anything that shocks him won’t do.”

“There’s nothing sensational in the piece, ma’am.”

“He isn’t at all well. Sure these seats are not in a draught?”

“Here’s a side door,” pointing on the diagram, “and sometimes it is opened for ventilation. Now these,” and he indicates other seats, “are safe from draught.”

“But aren’t they a long way from the stage? My husband is a little hard of hearing.”

“Then these may suit you,” and he again places his finger on the chart. “I have two seats here, four rows from the front, and no door near them.”

“You don’t suppose it would be too warm down there,” and she turns the third set of tickets over to see if some hidden fault may not be discovered on their backs. “Are they too close to a

heat register? No? Well, I think they will do.” She takes out her purse, extracts the price slowly, and the sale seems about to be closed satisfactorily, but a sudden thought comes to her. “Oh, my—I forgot. My husband is very tall. He won’t sit with his legs all cramped up. I’m afraid there’s not space enough between these rows of seats for him. Is there?”

The man rouses himself to a supreme effort and a victorious one. Taking two more tickets from the rack and directing her eyes to the diagram, he says: “Here’s precisely what you want—out of the draught, away from the heat, and, see, just there the last straight row and the first of the semi-circle leave extra space between.”

## New and Old Processes



## VIII.

### NEW AND OLD PROCESSES.

LESS than twenty years ago a set of wooden doors opened the way to costly realism on the American stage. Before that painted cloth had flapped with the entrance and exit of even millionaires in mansions. These solid doors were a novelty in a play at a New York theatre. They were banged so proudly as to distract attention from the dramatic action. Shams had already begun to give place to real things in the mounting of plays, but those doors marked the new era. A room with its sides and ceiling complete is now a matter of course. One of the old style, with no actual surface save at the back, is disdained in any theatre of the first grade.

Objects that used to be painted on the walls are now hung there. The plain table or a peasant's cot cannot any more be made fit for my lord's palace by covering it with a gaudy cloth.

Some critics say that ornamentation is carried too far. When the artist paints a portrait, they argue, he brings out the individual and obscures the surroundings. They hold that by disregarding this rule of art the actor is subordinated to the scene. That is a theory. The practice of the modern producer of a play is to illustrate it to the utmost that his resources and his faith in the venture warrant. In results we in America are not behind the best that is done in Europe. This is more surely observable in our importations of foreign plays. A reproduction here of a modern piece in vogue at the Comédie Française may be taken as a casual illustration. A great deal of nonsense is believed about that foremost

French state theatre. The acting is always admirable there, and, although some of its artificial methods would not be approved by us, it is done by accomplished artists. A critical comparison of the two casts of the comedy in question, however, showed that ours was of quite as high a grade in the average of ability, and the actors were so judiciously controlled that a naturalness not possible to the Comédie methods was attained. Our mounting of the piece was superior to the other. The scenery and costumes at the French theatre had been unexceptionable art in design and execution, but the same qualities were displayed on our stage with much opulence in addition. The structure and painting of the rooms were exactly alike, but our furniture was richer, and the gowns of our actresses incomparably finer, with no violation of good taste. The meaning of the dresses were not destroyed by the

increased richness. For instance, when two titled women of wealth went out together on an errand of charity the sincere one wore a plain though modish costume, while her frivolous companion was clothed as finely as though out for a round of formal calls. When a social adventuress prepared to make an amorous impression on a husband, she arrayed herself in the most alluring gown imaginable, while the staid wife appeared in an equally fashionable garb of circumspect simplicity. This representation at one of our theatres is not singled out as unusual, but because the writer is able to judge of it in connection with the original at what is commonly regarded as the foremost theatre in the world. That and many other performances have proved that America needs no subsidized stage for the development of dramatic art. Such an institution, directed by well-meaning but inexperienced men, or, still worse, by

astute false pretenders, would be surely useless and probably injurious. We are getting along very well under the prevailing conditions.

But there is, in our theatrical field, a return to the easier and cheaper methods of "the palmy days," along with a revival of the hard work then required. In thirty to forty cities resident stock companies exist in the manner once general but afterward abandoned. Their prices of admission are low. They bring out an old play every Monday night. They cannot take the pains or the risk involved in those that have never been acted, nor can they get those that are still profitable for tours. They pay \$50 to \$150 a week for the use of the best plays that the travelling companies have dropped. In exceptional cases, where competing theatres in a big city want the same drama, the price goes up to \$500. The classical plays are free matter against

unauthorized dramatizations, and so are those modern pieces, from "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "East Lynne" to "Cyrano de Bergerac," which the authors did not protect by copyright. Actors in the resident companies have to rehearse mornings and perform afternoons and evenings. They lack the time to perfect themselves in their rôles. They are chosen for quick study, however, and do surprisingly well. Sometimes two are engaged for heroes and two for heroines, each being assigned to a leading part one week and a lesser one the ensuing week. By that means the hardest tasks of rehearsing and of acting are alternated.

The cases of one actress who became insane in one of these resident companies and another who died illustrated the overwork demanded of the leaders. The first had spent two years almost incessantly in such employment, acting each week a rôle new to her, and the day

and night round of studying, rehearsing, and performing was more than her brain could stand any longer. The second wore herself out physically, and, with the remark, "I wish I could rest," fell dead at the conclusion of a rehearsal. The reader may wonder why it was that in the old days this kind of hard labor was done as a matter of course. The conditions were less laborious than they are now. The resident actors were then used almost altogether in the support of travelling stars, whose repertoires were largely familiar, and so some of the plays were repeated season after season. Every member of a stock company was engaged for a definite line of characters, and was partially prepared for at least half of those which he would be called on to sustain. Besides that, the demands by the audiences were not nearly so exacting as they have become, even in the cheaper theatres, under the culture of

improved taste. The versatility which imagination rather than memory ascribes to the bygone player did not exist to anything like the degree that we are sometimes told of. The actor was not required to differentiate his impersonations sharply; nor to adhere to the text precisely, save in standard pieces; nor to be concisely explicit in conveying the author's meaning instead of his own hasty understanding of the matter. He was permitted to do his work in ways that were careless as contrasted with the thoroughness required by the best stagecraft of to-day, and which is approached as nearly as possible in the present stock companies. The two women, one crazed and the other killed, might have borne the work of leading actresses thirty years ago, but they broke under the effort to play a different heroine with modern excellence every week.

These cut-rate stock companies have developed odd phases. One of them is

the imitation of stars in familiar characters. As new plays are rarely available, and the supply of desirable old ones is being exhausted, those that have served their time for starring purposes are utilized. Then the leading actor is called upon to be like some stage celebrity in a part already well known to the audience. He does the best he can, but is not often able to produce a close resemblance.

There is no indication of a return to the former method of travelling stars supported by resident companies. But not unusually a saw-mill, a threshing machine, an ore-crusher, or some other mechanical factor in a drama of harsh excitement, makes a tour. Sometimes, too, a set of scenery, more peculiar or elaborate than the local manager can afford to supply, and for which a make-shift will not do, is provided by the owners of the plays rented out for use in these houses.

Too much should not be expected of these companies. That under disadvantages of haste and flurry they should produce results comparable with those by really less capable travelling parties is simply impossible. Unreasonable expectations, therefore, are bound to be disappointed. But to the considerate observer, who knows what can be done on the stage and what cannot, and who has in mind no distant view of "the palmy days" to be disenchanted, the achievements of most of these organizations should be satisfactory. They vary widely in merit. Some are composed of the best available performers, and are remuneratively supported by an intellectual class of people, inclined to economize in their amusements. No handsomer or more politely conducted theatres are to be found than the better ones in which resident companies play at rates running no higher than fifty cents for the choicest seat. In other

houses the rabble is appealed to with coarser plays, mingled with vaudeville interludes. When works of a literary quality do not also contain popular diversion, or when they are artistically singular, they fare badly with the multitude. When "Cyrano de Bergerac" was performed in highly intelligent Boston a woman advertised to give lessons "enabling one to comprehend and appreciate Rostand's tragedy." In less respectful New York the urchins in the gallery derided the nasally odd hero as "Nosey," and were loud in their facetious comments on the singular heroine. The American sense of the ludicrous is nowhere keener than in a theatre. Things of serious intent that go wrong may be only politely smiled at by a Broadway assemblage, but they provoke merciless ridicule in the Bowery. "Trilby" was an example of a play accepted by the one kind of audience sedately and by the other hilariously.

When it was given by a cheap stock company in a Northern city, the only points that interested the first night's assemblage much were the bare feet of the heroine. Audible comments on them incited the actress to do something to divert attention to the play's theme of hypnotism. So, in the second performance she fell flat on the floor when the mesmerist exerted his influence upon her, instead of giving the prescribed obedience to his will. The curtain was lowered, and the stage manager came out to say that the actor, having unknowingly developed a hypnotic power, had thrown the actress into a real trance. The house was crowded by rapt people the rest of the week. The woman's device may not have been the best dramatic art, but it at least lifted the regard for her performance from her feet to her head.

## The Writing of a Play



## IX.

### THE WRITING OF A PLAY.

WHAT of the making of the material sold in the theatres? How do the authors write the plays? In almost as many ways as there are dramatists. In one respect, however, their methods hardly ever differ. They first make an outline of the plot, characters, and episodes in what is called a scenario. The author may have carried the scheme a long time in his head, a lot of memoranda may have accumulated in his desk, and separate passages may have been written in full. But when he sets to work in earnest he lays out a plan almost precisely as an architect does in building a house. Sometimes this

includes the salient points only, and sometimes it goes into minute details. Anyway, it shapes and forms his entire play.

By this time he has studied the possibilities of his theme and decided what his characters shall do. He has learned by experience that his work is more difficult than that of the novelist. He must not describe things, but present them. He may resort to narrative only at the risk of losing the attention of an audience. A play of words and not of deeds is like the proverbial "garden full of weeds." The personages will not amount to much if they merely talk. They must show their traits, motives, and intentions in action. The soliloquy is, therefore, not in favor with the modern playwright. These conditions impose long and hard labor upon even the geniuses among writers for the stage. More time and thought are often spent on a scenario than in writing out

the play. It may be said that a drama of the first class is a good year's task.

The playwright must keep his characters plainly before him all the while. It is essential that he shall know where they are, whether active or idle. Whenever they stir it should mean something. An indefinite movement may spoil the effect which he intends to make. The audience sees quite as much as it hears. One of our well-known authors sets small puppets on a miniature stage and moves them about. In no other way can he keep the situations clearly in mind while devising and developing them. Another man of equal renown needs no such signs or tokens. The scene in every detail is vivid to him without any aids. Others make notes on diagrams. Still others use whatever small things happen to be at hand. An old jack-knife and a pair of scissors were the hero and heroine of a certain famous drama during all the

time that it was being written. One expert in stagecraft, who happens to be also a devotee of chess, works out the action on a chess-board. He fancies that he is helped in that way to solve the problems of his plot. He opposes his forces of good and evil, plays them against each other, and wins final victories for the right. Nonsense? Not if it facilitates his work. His fancy requires incitement.

At the other extreme may be mentioned a man who never has to make so much as a dot on paper to assist his memory as to the action. He has his troubles of another kind. He is compelled to guard himself against confusion and inconsistencies in the various interests of the play in hand. He makes diagrams of them, showing their starts and stops, rises and falls, contacts and separations. Thus he sees their proportions, and builds them up or pulls them down to suit their relative



DAVID BELASCO.



BRONSON HOWARD.



importance. This diagram becomes an elaborate chart as his work progresses. It is clear to him, if to nobody else. It guides him in keeping his principal characters dominant and his minor ones subordinate. By means of it he moves everything toward that climax which every successful drama must reach.

What the actors do besides speaking the words of a play is called the "business." The old-fashioned way was to insert that word in the copy at points where special action was required. The particulars were given at the rehearsals. Nowadays the author is more explicit in his manuscript. He prescribes the movements that each character shall make. Nothing is left to chance, nor to the actor's choice. When he is to sit and when to stand, where he is to go and how long to stay, what feeling he is to show when silent, what degree of emotion he is to express when speaking—all these directions are set down.

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Some authors tell, also, how the personages should look. A paragraph describes each individual much as a novelist does it, though very briefly and concisely. This is frequently extended to the color of a woman's eyes and hair. She must be tall or short, slim or stout, pretty or ugly, as best serves the purpose. In short, the writer of stage fiction tries hard to have his characters look and behave exactly as he wishes them to. His design may be carried out. That depends. He may be eminent and obdurate enough to have his own way. In that case his contracts stipulate that not so much as a word shall be changed without his consent. The manner of the acting, also, must be obedient to his orders. He also may be able to dictate the time when the play shall be presented, and the theatre, too. The selection of actors may require his approval, and his authority may extend to rehearsals.

But, as a rule, it is not so. Sometimes the buyer of the manuscript is free to do just as he pleases with it. He has the right to adapt it to any purpose and to any extent. Plays written quite seriously have before now been turned into hilarious farces merely by exaggerating them. The longest lived of the frivolously gay spectacular pieces in this country, the very name of which became a trade-mark for a gaudy show, was originally an ambitious composition in blank verse. The author and his heirs are thought to have received \$125,000 in royalties.

Truth is often too strange for fiction. Every day's newspapers tell of things in real life too singular to be used in other plays than heedless farces or reckless melodramas. Some authors keep scrap-books, and get suggestions from them. But the novice who thinks that an episode is good for the stage because it has really happened will go astray

nine times in ten. In some ways the work of the dramatist is more difficult now than formerly. Plagiarism, always a crime in other departments of literature, used to be a matter of course in the theatre. French and German plays were translated into English and put forth brazenly as original. Everything published abroad was open to seizure. After a while foreign authors kept their plays in manuscript, and in that way controlled the stage rights here. The international copyright law, when its conditions are complied with, now prevents the thefts formerly common. If the native author wishes to use this material, he must pay for it. There are agents who make a business of selling French and German plays for that purpose.

The American writer, besides being thrown upon his own resources, has to be more careful and ingenious than his predecessors. He is asked to construct

his plays in such a way that each act may be shown in a single elaborate scene. It is hard to suit the action to that purpose and still make it reasonable. If he writes for people above the average in culture, his characters must be impelled by natural motives to do probable things. The advance in these respects has been marked within the last quarter of a century. No more may a couple of comic actors be sent out to kill time with an irrelevant dialogue while the scenery is being changed. Incongruities and inconsistencies are no longer deemed immaterial. Such lapses in the central personages and their story must be avoided.

The American author suffers from restrictions not imposed in the Old World, save in England. Audiences in those two great countries of the theatre, Germany and France, do not insist that a play shall end happily if such a conclusion is not logical. They are willing

that other than sentimental themes shall be illustrated on the stage. In this country a love interest must be paramount, or the majority of people will not be pleased; at least, the manager thinks they will not, and that is quite conclusive with the playwright. If he does not suit his work to the market, it will remain unsold. He is debarred from experiments. The manager is ready to import a novelty that has been tested abroad, but he will not risk his money in original ventures. Only a few of our star actors are brave enough to strike out in new directions.

Collaboration is often advantageous. An author unskilled in the technique of the drama, and a stage manager who has no ability in composition, may together turn out an excellent play. In that way theatrical versions of novels have lately been made with much success. The book is usually turned over to the dramatist, and he utilizes much



MARTHA MORTON.



MARGUERITE MERINGTON.



or little of it, as he deems best. Not more than one novel in a thousand contains the qualities essential to a play; and this thousandth story must be told on the stage in a few clear, strong episodes. A book of maybe two hundred thousand words has to be reduced to thirty-five thousand. Sometimes, when a play has the names of two authors attached, it is because one wrote it crudely or too lengthily and it was placed in the hands of the other to be torn to pieces and put together again in better form.

A certain drama was so long, as it came from its writer, that a performance would have occupied three evenings. There was plenty of wheat in the chaff, however, and the manager who threshed out the grain was richly repaid. Good results have been reached by two authors working in unison from the beginning to the end. This partnership is usually between the originator

of the material and the manipulator. The former writes a scene and the other puts it into a shape that will be effective. Thus working along, separately and together, they build up the play. But in at least one instance the two authors sat opposite each other at a table day after day during most of a year, and neither did alone anything worth mentioning. From the first word of the scenario to the last word ready to be spoken by an actor they collaborated in the fullest meaning of the word. The piece did not have to be altered in a line during rehearsals, and after seven years it is still being played in America and England.

The spirit of woman suffrage prevails at the better class of theatres. Women's votes for or against a play count for more than men's. If a piece pleases them it is bound to prosper. The reason is that men are apt to leave the choice of stage amusement to the women whom

they accompany. Authors take that into account when they lay out the plan of a play. How will this, that, or the other thing strike an intelligent, sympathetic, womanly woman? One author of many pieces does not trust himself to answer those questions. He refers them to an unbiased jury for decision. He excludes actresses and others imbued with theatric feeling, and reads the scenes to half a dozen women and girls who fairly represent the likes and dislikes of their sex. If these critics agree upon a verdict, he never for a moment thinks of appealing from it.



## Author's Gains and Losses



## X.

### AUTHOR'S GAINS AND LOSSES.

EDWIN FORREST was praised for liberality when he offered \$1000 for the best American tragedy. "Metamora," which won the prize, was one of three hundred and seventy-nine submitted. Eminent literary men were among the competitors. No actor in our time would think of obtaining a good play on such terms, and no dramatist of proved skill would respond. As to the work of novices, it is offered profusely anyway. A recognized master of stagecraft does not, as a rule, complete a play without a contract. He first sketches out his scheme, briefly but clearly, and submits it to some manager to whose

purpose he deems it best suited. If this man likes the subject and the principal characters, he feels that the expert writer will probably develop their value. So he is ready to buy an option on it.

The ordinary prepayments on a play by an author of standing are \$500 upon the delivery of a scenario and \$500 more upon the completion of the play. If the finished work does not realize expectations, or if the manager for any other reason does not desire to put it on the stage, the money paid is forfeited after a certain lapse of time, and the ownership reverts to the author. But if the manager decides to produce the piece, the author receives a percentage of the gross receipts, payable weekly, after the amount previously advanced has been deducted. This royalty is hardly ever less than five per cent. Ordinarily it increases with the amount of money taken in.

Perhaps as good terms as any Ameri-

can playwright has obtained are five per cent. of each week's gross receipts up to \$3000, ten per cent. of the next \$2000, fifteen per cent. of the next \$2000, twenty per cent. of the next \$2000, and twenty-five per cent. of all over \$9000. It is only with a rare success that the income reaches the highest figure given. More than one native drama has earned \$100,000 for its author or authors. Perhaps a dozen have yielded \$50,000 each, three times as many \$25,000, and a goodly number \$10,000.

Dramas that have won success abroad are eagerly sought after by American managers and star actors. A cash-down payment of \$25,000 has been made in several instances. Stars draw audiences by themselves, to a certain extent, and so with them the royalty seldom rises above ten per cent., and never exceeds fifteen per cent. Sometimes a fixed sum is paid for each performance.

This may be as little as \$5 or as much as \$50.

Although the humorous American author may be as odd as he pleases, the serious one is cramped by the conditions. He must strive to please, first, the timorous manager; and, second, the whimsical public. It will not do to consider only the tastes of the few; he must satisfy the many. Some of the plays highly recommended by the professional critics fail to become popular. Some that offend them are triumphant with the multitude. The greatest successes, as measured in money, are won with homely dramas, honest in sentiment, though perhaps trite; true in characterization, though with possibly rough types, and clean, though maybe coarse. A play which appeals to all grades of intelligence, and gives pleasure to all sorts of people alike, is a fortune to its owner.

When the royalty paid to the play-

wright is a percentage of the gross receipts, each week's sum is figured out after Saturday night's performance. A check for the amount is mailed to him, with a detailed statement of the money taken in. These vouchers are signed by the treasurer of the theatre, or those of perhaps six theatres if the play is on a tour of the smaller places. The number and prices of tickets sold for each portion of the house are given. The figures in these weekly exhibits are curiously irregular. If the entertainment is giving satisfaction, the audiences should increase steadily from Monday night until either Friday or Saturday. In the Northern States Saturday night is fashionable as well as popular, and in the South, Friday night is favored in that way. There is no reason save custom for the difference. Outside things are always happening to vary the normal run of receipts. A storm will keep people away. So will

a big social affair or a political meeting. A Sunday-school excursion or a baseball game may leave a village opera-house nearly empty at a *matinée*. A fire early in the evening may have the same effect. The facts are noted on the statement sent to the author. One from a Rocky Mountain town showed \$13 taken in, and bore the explanation: "Donation party and dog fight." They were separate affairs presumably, and they drew away two classes of supporters of the drama.

There is always in America a keen relish for novelty in all grades of plays, from the smoothest comedy to the roughest farce, and from a tragedy in blank verse to a melodrama in mock heroics. The standard works are put aside in favor of new things. The genius of Shakespeare is respected as much as ever, but it cannot compete with the modern proficiency which provides things new and strange. Besides

trying to satisfy the demands of audiences, the playwright sometimes has to make a character fit a star. The most popular of the actors are rarely versatile. Here again we have proof of women's superiority to men in that respect. Women stars adapt themselves to rôles. Men stars usually require that rôles shall be adapted to them. The writer must bear in mind their individual traits and manners. He must not go beyond the limit of their abilities. Therefore, the made-to-order play may have to be taken in at one point and let out at another to make it a good fit.

It is but recently that the American playwright has been defended against those who would steal his property. The laws which forbade the use of his plays without authority were almost null and void. Every successful play was performed by companies in remote parts of the country, in open defiance, or under a false title. Efforts to stop

this were vain. But the copyright law was amended three years ago. To enact wilfully a copyrighted play without the owner's consent is now a crime punishable by imprisonment. This statute applies to amateur actors as well as professionals. Everybody concerned is a culprit. That the object is a charity is no defence. The only exception is when no admission fee is charged. This new law does not cover the thousand and one old pieces still available to amateurs. But it protects the more recent ones, foreign or native, that have complied with the copyright regulations.

The playwright of recognized skill may protect himself against doing any unpaid work, but some of his pieces are bound to fail, partly, if not utterly, and in those cases he receives for his long, hard job only the \$1000 or so of prepayment. For the bulk of the plays written there is no reward in either fame or fortune. The number of au-



CLYDE FITCH.



AUGUSTUS THOMAS.



thors who try their hand at stage literature is very large. Novelists, expert in creating plots and personages for books, and journalists, clever in analytical and descriptive composition, are dazzled by the prizes in the theatrical lottery. Most of them draw blanks. They are prone to complain that their manuscripts are not read considerably by the managers. They say that the prejudice against native work is too great for merit to overcome. They even assert that there is no use at all in submitting a play except under circumstances insuring a careful perusal. Truth and error are mixed in those charges. One of our foremost managers has employed a reader during the last ten years. In all that time he has not received through that medium a single play which he thought worth acceptance. He has seen his way clear to use only those obtained by him personally from experienced dramatists. Plays clever in story, dic-

tion, or some other literary quality are plentiful, but those with actable merits are scarce. No doubt a work of genius, or at least of popular value, is sometimes overlooked or not understood by the reader for a theatre. But managers are too eager for good material to disregard anything proffered by any one known to be a writer by profession, even though the hope of finding "pay ore" in the enormous output is faint.

After the play is written, and a manager has decided to produce it, the author has something to say about the selection of actors for its performance—by right or courtesy, as the case may be. He desires that every part shall be interpreted for all it is worth, and more if possible. He knows that, beyond the immediate effect of good acting, the first portrayal of a character fixes it for life. No matter how long it may exist on the stage, or how bad an actor may after a while be put into

it, the manner of the first performance will not be lost. The imitation may become poorer and poorer, but it will remain an imitation to the end. One question that arises in forming a company is the value of favorites. An actor whom an audience knows beforehand gets quicker attention, but is it not better if he is a total stranger, provided he has the right ability? Then he is regarded solely as a personage of the play, and is not the illusion greater? Some authors think so. "But that's nonsense," replies the manager; "you might as well tell me that there's no value in a star's reputation." One is thinking of art, the other of business, and usually it is the other who decides.

Practically the time and place of giving the first performance rest with the manager also, though within certain limits they may be set by the contract. "An adequate representation in a first-class theatre on or before January 1" is

less definite than it seems. For example, a "first-class" theatre means one in which the top prices of admission are charged. Then, too, the phrase, "an adequate representation," is elastic. It may be construed by the author as demanding the best costumes, scenery, and acting that money and skill can procure. But the manager may give no more than a tolerably good production and still be within the letter of the agreement, though disregarding its spirit. Again, much depends on the standing of the theatre in which the play is brought out. In New York City certain stages are identified with certain kinds of pieces. A serious drama would be ineffectual where farces had ruled for a long time. As to time, the best is between the first of October and the last of March. Yet between those dates are the worst two weeks in the season for theatrical business—the week before Christmas and Holy Week. But

these are points beyond the author's say-so. His manuscript has been completed. His work has been hard. That which remains to do may be still harder. His play is now ready for rehearsal.



## The Rehearsal of a Play



## XI.

### THE REHEARSAL OF A PLAY.

FEW who see a new play well performed have any idea of the careful preparation given it. The hardest work done by actors is at rehearsals. These last about four weeks for a piece that is to be finely brought out. The first thing done is to call the company together to hear the piece read. The actors may have known little about it except the portions contained in their separate rôles. By courtesy the author is asked to be the reader, but he usually declines in favor of the stage director. This meeting is held in any handy room, in a theatre or elsewhere. The director makes use of his best elocution,

so that the actors may catch the spirit and full meaning of the scenes as they sit before him like any other audience. Each pays especial heed to the passages in which he is to figure. He is anxious about the relations which he is to bear to the others, and he may also be jealous about his comparative importance. The reading includes all the directions as well as the dialogue, and occupies about two hours, or the same time that a performance of the same play will take, aside from the intermissions between acts.

After the reading is over each actor receives a typewritten copy of his part. The whole play is not given to him. Then the director announces the time and place of the first rehearsal, which is usually held the next morning on a stage. But in the autumn, when numerous companies are being drilled in New York, small halls have to be used instead. The players come in every-day

street attire, and if the place is none too well warmed, they keep their overcoats, wraps, and hats on. If it is in a theatre, the stage is nearly bare of scenery, and is dimly lighted by a bad blend of bunched gas-jets and obscure windows. If it is in a hall, the light is better, but the barrenness is worse. The stage is represented by a chalk-lined space on the floor. The things that will by and by give illusion and glamour are not so much as suggested. The reality of a first rehearsal is in the widest kind of contrast with the performance which it is intended to lead to.

The entirely utilitarian aspect of rehearsing is not made less by the fact that the actors receive no pay for it. If they are not at the same time getting salaries for acting in a current piece, they are without income during the practice on the new one. This is an invariable custom.

On the first morning the opening act

only is taken up. The players have not yet been required to memorize their parts. They are to learn the action first. They go through with the positions and movements as written down by the author and explained by the director. Doors and windows are indicated by chairs. Balconies, stairways, fences, gates, sloping banks, winding paths, floral bowers—all are located by make-shifts. The aim is to familiarize the actors at the outset with the arrangement of the scene as it is to be. At the same time their movements with reference to one another are learned slowly and carefully. While they are doing this they read the words without much attempt at expression. On the same afternoon the second act may be gone through with. At the end of the day's work, which does not in the early stages include the evening, the director says: "Ten o'clock to-morrow morning—first act rough perfect without parts." He



WILLIAM GILLETTE.



means that the actors are expected to learn their parts in that portion of the play so as to recite them without referring to the copy. The next rehearsal begins with their attempt to do this. Some are able to, while others fail and have to keep their manuscript in hand. On the third day they will be reprimanded if still unprepared with the first act. All may then be told to study the second act for the ensuing day, when the third act may be taken up.

Thus the actors are made to work their way along through the play. By the end of a week they have learned both the language and action more or less completely. They are much like pupils in a school. Some are quick and assiduous. Others are slow and inattentive. Some do their very best and some do not. The brainy actor who is careless may be harder to get along with than the dullard who takes pains. While a liberal education is very helpful, first-

rate work is done without it by persons born with a gift for acting. These are comic actors, as a rule, in whom nicety is less essential than mirth. Still, a certain player of dignified old gentlemen knows no grammar by precept or practice. His ever-correct language on the stage comes of word-by-word adherence to the text. He is even right in the use of his pronouns. It is not always easy to keep the cultured actor from saying "me" when he should say "I."

Each part in a play is copied out for the actor assigned to it. In addition to the language to be spoken by him it contains the cues—that is to say, every separate speech, long or short, is preceded by several concluding words from the next prior speech of some other person. That gives him the cue to begin. He must memorize these scraps of sentences quite as thoroughly as the matter that he is to utter, in order that

his responses shall be ready. He must be particular about the ends of his own speeches, too, because they are in turn the cues for his companions. Lapses at these points cause confusion.

The rehearsals have not gone far before the director gives notice that all must be "letter perfect." What he means is that now the actors must recite their entire parts correctly in every word. Some are able to do that without difficulty. Others are surprisingly slow even when they try hard. As the matter is broken up in dialogue, in which questions and answers are reminders of each other, the study is not often one that would be thought hard by a bright schoolboy. Still, there are actors otherwise clever who bother the director by mumbling and jumbling long after others are letter perfect. If reproof and prompting do not mend the fault, "rehearsal for lines" is called. Then the company sits before the director in

a semicircle and recites the entire play without action. The smallest deviation from the text is corrected.

Before the second week is over the players have learned to say and do everything that has been set down for them by the author. Here and there an actor is fully prepared at this juncture to play his part in public. But it is not so with the majority. The women are more advanced than the men, as a rule, partly from having applied themselves more faithfully and partly from the sex's natural aptness. The director now devotes all his efforts to bringing forward the laggards, teaching the inexperienced and perfecting the proficient. It must not be inferred that talent is repressed at rehearsals. It is merely guided. Strong individuality is not objected to if only it is adaptable. The keynote in modern acting is naturalness. Human beings in plays are now re-

quired to speak as human beings do in real life under like circumstances.

The hardest work of the director remains to be done. It is that of making the actors carry out the author's intention fully. They cannot be left to themselves. Each would play his part with small regard for the general effect. Some of them have creative ability, and the director is glad to hear what they have to say, because their suggestions are often valuable. Many a rôle that was small as written has become big when acted. But the majority of the actors are mere puppets in the hands of the man who conducts the rehearsals. His word is their law. He tells them how their parts shall be played. This extends to the pronunciation of the smallest word and the making of the faintest gesture. Nothing whatever is left unfixed before the public performance.

It is only by a method of positive control that the whole purpose of a play can be carried out. It would be defeated if the actors were at all free to do as they thought fit. Some are tractable. Some are wilful. All must obey or quit. So the stage director is an autocrat, and he may be a tyrant. He is a master of stagecraft, and he may be a dramatic scholar. Above all else, he needs the theatric instinct. When he sees or hears a thing he should know intuitively, as well as by rule and precedent, whether it will convey its meaning to an audience. He may be a gentleman or a boor. In most cases he is a gentleman. He deals with men and women of culture, in the main; and, though firm, he is polite and good-tempered. It is the duty of the director to preserve the proper balance of all the play's various interests. He may blurt out his orders and reproofs without caring if they wound any one's feelings, or he

may call individuals aside for private correction. But in any case he enforces his views and commands obedience. The reason that outsiders are but rarely admitted to rehearsals is therefore obvious.

Rehearsals are funny in some ways. The dead-in-earnest director himself is comic at times. That is so when he shows an actress how to speak and behave in a sentimental scene. A hulk of a man posing as a gentle maiden and breathing vows of constancy to her lover is a ridiculous sight. But his illustration is clear enough. He might not be able to play even a minor male rôle cleverly, but he has to have the knack of teaching others. He has a school-master's troubles, too. One of them is to keep the actors quiet when they are not in the scene. They are prone to chatter in groups. Points of difficulty arise constantly for the director to settle. They usually come from the

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actors' common desire to be made the most of.

The two who impersonate the lovers in the play are especially given to disagreement. Each is afraid of being put back or aside in favor of the other. The centre of the stage is the place of vantage in their minds, and they do like to hold it. In passing each other, which shall do so on the side toward the audience? When one must turn away from the people, which shall thus hide the face? Each is in dread lest the other gain an advantage in one way or another. When such a thing cannot be helped, owing to the author's directions, they do not hesitate to ask that changes be made. The comedians are all this time striving for chances for their fun, and would obtrude it into the serious scenes too much if they could.

The utmost pains are taken with scenes in which two persons have anything to do with each other. If they

shake hands, it must be done at just the right instant and with no uncertainty. A blow is practised till it looks just right, and is never afterward struck differently. Embraces and kisses are rehearsed with the extremest care. They must have an impulsive manner. They must look sufficiently fervid. It is a curious sight—that of two players who are to express the ardent love which Shakespeare has written for his “Romeo and Juliet,” but who at rehearsal, in modern clothes and no accessories of glamour, practise a kiss as mechanically and unfeelingly as though it were—as it is then—utterly devoid of sentiment. There must be no hesitation nor clumsiness. Romeo is not permitted to decide whether to throw both arms around his sweetheart or only one, or which. Nor may Juliet be shy or forward, yielding or resisting, as she chooses. The director will place their arms for them if they do not themselves

make a picturesque exhibit of tenderness.

And the kiss? Shall it be delivered by the wooer on the lips of the won, or on brow, or cheek? That question is considered and settled. Are kisses on the stage genuine? Well, not at rehearsals, except, maybe, once or twice, in order to show the effect fully. An actress would resent a real kiss at a rehearsal except when necessary. For the satisfaction of natural curiosity on that point it may be told right here that most of the kisses in the public performances of plays are actual kisses.

Setting Everything Ready



## XII.

### SETTING EVERYTHING READY.

MEANWHILE the scenery is under way. Children's eyes would sparkle at the models the artist makes. He follows the author's written directions. He begins with water-color sketches. When actual places are to be shown, he goes to them with a camera or buys photographs already made. Illustrated books are looked up and famous pictures are copied for historical dramas. After he has obtained the things to guide him he makes each set of scenery in miniature. The result looks like one of the toy stages sold in the stores. The size varies between two and four feet wide,

with proportionate height and depth, according as the details are few or many. Every object is put in, just as it is to be in the enlarged room—street, forest, landscape, or whatever else. The artist draws and colors on cardboard. The different sections are then cut out and fastened on the little stage.

When this has been done the scene is lighted up as though it were in use at a theatre. Thus the effects may be judged exactly. The author and the manager criticise it. The view from the front is not the only consideration. There must be the right places for the players to come and go, and spaces for their prescribed action. Change upon change may be necessary before the model is satisfactory. When once it is accepted the artist is not bound to make any further alteration. He conducts his business independently, taking separate jobs, and renting quarters in some one of the New York theatres having

room to spare. Usually he is a specialist. His forte may be rooms, or exterior architecture, or landscapes. The scenery of one play may be provided by several different men chosen for their respective abilities. Each makes a contract for his portion of the work. The prices have a wide range, from as little as \$100 for a very plain apartment to as much as \$1000 for an elaborate setting. The sum depends more on quality than quantity. The man who is a real artist, creative and ingenious, gets the highest pay. The one who is hardly more than a mechanic, unable to idealize or originate, gets the lowest.

The same young eyes that sparkled at sight of the pretty model might fill with tears to see it torn to bits. It next goes to the stage carpenter, who takes it apart piece by piece. He is to build the necessary framework for the scenery; also the stairways, platforms, bridges,

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and so on. The model has been made to a reduced scale, like an architect's plans for a house, say an inch to a foot, and the carpenter follows it exactly. His original skill is applied to devices for packing the outfit snugly in a railway car for travel. He puts in joints and hinges, so that what cannot be rolled may be separated and folded. He saves space by making some portions reversible, in order that either side may be turned to the front. If the play is to have changes of scenery in sight of the audience, or such episodes as a fire, explosion, shipwreck, or other disaster by land or sea, the mechanical construction has to be ingenious. A really clever stage carpenter's wages rise to \$50 a week regularly, or else he makes more by taking jobs at lump sums.

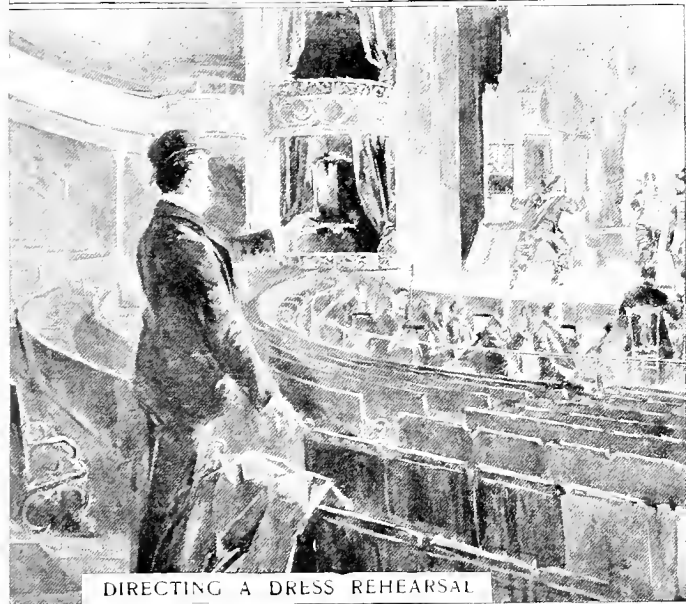
The model and all the things that have been built from it are next taken in hand by the painters. They occupy a room big enough to hang the cloths



SHIFTING THE SCENERY



MAKING A SCENIC MODEL



DIRECTING A DRESS REHEARSAL



for the largest scenes. The rear wall of a stage and a gallery or bridge, running across high up, are used in most cases. The scenic artist does not do more than half of the painting. Less expert yet proficient employés leave only the difficult parts to be done by him. They adhere to the shapes, colors, and dimensions that have been fixed in the model. Parts that cannot be enlarged by means of frames and canvas, such as small rocks, trunks of trees, and broken walls, are shaped in *papier-maché* by an expert known as the property man. He needs to be considerable of an artist, too. All sorts of things come within his line, from the broken gun-carriage in a battle-field to the imitation of marble statuary in a studio. He makes the animals which are operated by enclosed men in comic operas, and the monsters that swallow folks in the pantomimes. He provides all the small objects used in a play that are not purchasable ready

made. The furniture, draperies, and adornments of a scene are bought at the stores, or made to order if they are to be unique. Very rarely are they shams or makeshifts in these days of stage realism. They are usually just exactly what they purport to be.

The gowns for the actresses are being made while the other preparations for the new play are going on. There are costumers whose whole business is with the theatres. But of late the managers have taken to the big department stores instead, especially when modern fashionable styles are wanted. The actress is permitted to indulge her own taste, but not too much. She must obey the same man who controls her so absolutely at the rehearsals. It is for him to say what colors she shall wear. Otherwise she might choose those that would kill the effect of other dresses in the same scenes, or be themselves spoiled by the hues of walls and hangings. Samples

of the fabrics are examined under the lights that will be thrown on the garments when worn. The colors being settled, the actress is privileged to go to any dressmaker she likes and pay as much as she pleases out of her own pocket in addition to the amount allowed by the manager. Thus some of the gowns seen at receptions and balls on the stage are from the same establishments that make similar finery for the wealthiest women in modish society.

Indeed, the actresses are apt to keep a little in advance of the prevailing modes. In a measure they set the fashions. The dressmakers help them to do so in the hope that orders for duplicates may come in. If the play is away back in time and away off in place, so that the costumes are not to be in our own styles, they are first drawn in water-colors. Two or three different pictures are made for each. Several women are among the artists who get

from \$100 to \$500 for one of these jobs. Historical truth is demanded, but when faithful copies would be ugly the liberty of making them sightlier is taken. The hooped skirts of our women in 1861, for instance, are merely suggested in most of the war dramas. In the various kinds of plays in which the costumes are wholly fanciful the designer has ample scope for originality. A set of drawings for a recent comic opera numbered two hundred and sixty-seven, from which the needed seventy-four were selected.

It is not alone the finery of dress that calls for care. Old clothes are harder to get. Tattered gowns can hardly be made to order. To merely tear brand-new ones will not do. They must be made to look as though worn out. Rubbing and staining usually produce the right effect. The men get over this difficulty in a way that the women will not usually resort to. The actor as-

signed to the rôle of a tramp does not hesitate to buy a real tramp's suit. Washing and fumigation will make it safe to wear. If then it looks too clean, he stains and smudges it. But the actress, with the sensitiveness of her sex, will not often put on rags like that. She is prone to be fastidious, too, in using costumes that have been worn by other actresses.

The mimic soldiers that you see in dramas of our Civil War, whether Union or Confederate, sometimes wear uniforms that have seen service on battle-fields. Oftener they are from supplies that were sold cheap to dealers after peace came. Of these dealers, managers buy guns, blankets, swords, etc. The theatrical costumers also keep soiled costumes of various ages and countries on hand. They are the remains of former stage productions. An actor in quest of seedy clothes of any

period or country can secure exactly what he needs of a dealer in costumes.

Wigs have to be worn by many stage characters. If a blonde or a brunette has to turn herself into the other, she may do it by dyeing or bleaching. That is better than putting false hair on, and is frequently done if the play is expected to last long. Under those circumstances, an actor may let his locks grow long or cut them short. He may avoid the use of a false beard by raising one. But some pieces call for the powdered wigs of a bygone fashion. Eccentric characters commonly compel the actor to cover his own hair. Wigs are so important on the stage that the maker is a specialist. He will adapt them to any need, but he will charge accordingly; \$5 may buy a ready-made wig from his stock, though \$15 is the average. But he gets from \$25 to \$100 for an original piece of his best work.

If the earlier rehearsals have not

been held on the stage of a theatre, the director gets the use of one as soon as possible. Until then the actors do not feel at home in the play. Nor can the director form a clear judgment of their work before he sees it from an audience's point of view. Before this he has been right among them, explaining, illustrating, literally taking hold of them. Now he goes off the stage and observes critically all the things that he has made them do. Especially he studies the living pictures which follow one another in the action. He finds it necessary to make many changes. The movement at certain points is slow, awkward, or irrelevant. The climaxes at the ends of the acts require rearrangement, possibly involving a considerable amount of work. About this time the scenery is set up and the furniture put in place and all makeshifts are discarded. Now the actors feel their environment.

A rehearsal "with props" is next in order. All the movable objects, from my lady's bodkin to my lord's sword, are called properties. Ease must be acquired in handling them. If the play demands singing by a chorus, or dancing by a ballet corps, that feature has been prepared separately, and is now introduced in its proper place. If it is a "legitimate" drama, without songs, dances, or other interpolated diversion, it still may call for music incidental to its absorbing scenes to make them more impressive. This has to be practised carefully. The orchestra leader starts it at a cue spoken by one of the characters, and stops it at another, the catch-words being written in his score of the music. The "effects off," which include all the various noises which the author has described as being heard from outside, are timed by cues in the same exact manner. So is the management

of the lights. Much depends on these aids. Rehearsals have to be held to perfect the incidental music, the outside effects, and the shifts of light and darkness. Now the actors speak the lines with a care only for the cues.

The final rehearsal of the new play is called a "dress" rehearsal. It is just like an open performance, except that there is no audience other than a few persons directly interested in the venture. Everything is done on the stage, or should be, precisely as though it were in public. The scenery is set and lighted. The players enact their parts in every particular. For the first time they appear in the guises or disguises that have been decided on. The language and the action have become familiar, but this is the first that they see of one another in the characters fully assumed. The manager, author, and director criticise the performance,

make further changes, perhaps, and hope that it will please the first audience.

If the dress rehearsal has developed no unforeseen faults requiring alteration, the actors are not called together again until an hour before the time for the first performance to begin. It is better to give them an interval of rest, though it is often impossible to do so, and it sometimes happens that they rehearse arduously right up to the moment for putting on their costumes. But the players should have twenty-four hours in which to settle their nerves, pull themselves together, and approach the first night of the new play in their best possible condition of mind and body.

## The First Night of a Play



## XIII.

### THE FIRST NIGHT OF A PLAY.

IT is not the practice to give the first performance of a new play in a great city. No matter how carefully it has been written and rehearsed the result cannot be foreseen with certainty. So it may be in some village theatre within easy distance from New York that the author sees the first trial of his piece. He may not enjoy it, but it is necessary that he be there to find out what alterations are needed. He has miscalculated in some respects, if not in many. This knowledge he does not gain from the performance itself, because he has learned that at rehearsals, but he does

not know beforehand what the impression on an audience will be. He stays with the company a week, or maybe a month, improving his work. Some points which he depended on have proved worthless, and those he cuts out. Others which he did not think much of have shown value, and those he sharpens. Sometimes an entire scene or act has to be rewritten because it does not, when acted, convey the intended meaning or else is not interesting. Sometimes, alas! the whole play fails hopelessly, and that is the last of it. But if it is made to succeed with these early audiences, it is taken to some metropolis to undergo the more severe ordeal of a first night there.

If the play has aroused much attention, or is to be acted by a resident company of vogue in New York City, the demand for seats for the first night far exceeds the supply. Only the tickets sent in couples to the newspaper

critics are free. The rest might have been sold several times over. There are about a hundred New Yorkers who keep their orders on file for seats at all the original productions at the leading Broadway theatres. They are as faithful in their attendance as the professional critics. Twice as many more habitual "first-nighters" purchase their seats early. This large contingent is sometimes divided between two openings of equal interest, though usually it is gathered together. But if not much is expected of the new play, or it is to be given in an unfashionable house, the manager may have to distribute many tickets gratis. In either case the first New York audience is dreaded. It is cynical and hard to satisfy. But it is also very responsive with tears, laughter, and applause whenever the play moves it positively. Even though its verdict is not final, and may be reversed either one way or the other by later

assemblages, it is too important to be awaited with a placid mind by anybody concerned in the venture.

About half the seats on the lower floor of the theatre are occupied by the selfsame persons time after time. The owner of the theatre reserves a box, the manager another, a third is assigned to the author, and these are likely to hold family parties. Representatives of fashion, wealth, and brains are mingled. Men important in the business of amusements are present to see what the new play amounts to. Actors are not numerous, even few of those at leisure being present, unless free tickets have been distributed. They are not regarded as a desirable factor on these occasions. Their applause is so manifestly insincere and their comments so caustic that they are commonly shut out, unless they buy their admission like other people. The newspaper critics are a familiar contingent. Many



Drawn by B. J. Rosenmeyer.

THE LAST MOMENT ON THE STAGE BEFORE THE CURTAIN RISES.



weekly and monthly periodicals also send their writers. The journalists present number about fifty.

The aspect of a first-night assemblage is distinctly modish. A majority of the men wear the conventional evening dress, though the clawhammer coat may be displaced by the Tuxedo. The women do not put on sleeveless low corsages, as at the opera, but they do wear such gowns as are seen at afternoon receptions or the less formal night functions. These toilettes are more or less showy, according to individual taste. Hats and bonnets are absent. Sightly coiffures take the place of millinery. In Paris there is an organized "claque" under instructions when and what to applaud or laugh at. No such thing is practised here. Nevertheless, some of the applause by zealous friends of the author, manager, or actors is none the less dishonest. The ushers are sometimes told to join in. Hand-clapping, therefore,

does not necessarily mean admiration. Laughter is generally sincere, but not always. It has been known to be started and sustained by expert mimics of merriment.

The most anxious observers of the audience are the author and the manager. They watch and listen with hope and fear for indications of success or failure, but they usually keep out of sight, on the stage or behind the draperies of a box, and from these hiding-places they peep out at the audience and listen intently. Most of them are averse to showing themselves even when called out by an enthusiastic assemblage. The shrewdest of them are aware that they will be awkward in comparison with the actors, and that they will not figure to advantage as speechmakers.

There are authors who make willing exhibits of themselves on these occasions, however, and others who cannot

be induced to go near the theatre at all. But the manager has a steady head on his shoulders, and he wants to find out right away whether or not he has a valuable piece of property in the new play.

"That is going all right," a manager whispered to an author while a first performance was in progress last winter. It was in a scene which they had regarded as a risky experiment.

"But hear them cough," the author replied. Here and there a person was hacking, and the man was frightened by that sign of inattention.

"That doesn't mean anything."

"Oh, yes, it does!"

"Don't be a fool!" the manager exclaimed, at the same time laying his hand encouragingly on the other's arm; "the grip is epidemic."

So, that usual sign of inattention may fail when the weather is bad for colds. But the manager can be misled by zealous friends to conclude that the play

will be prosperous, or by the apathy of cynical persons that it will not. Technical and artistic merits are liked very much by first-night experts, but are not cared for so much by people who go later. The latter are stirred deeply by things which have not affected the former in the least.

Between the acts the habitual attendants discuss the play as far as it has progressed. Many are expert judges. Others think they are. Both express themselves freely. They chatter in their seats or form voluble groups in the lobbies. Here and there one looks preternaturally wise, but says nothing. The majority rules for the time being, and the impression that has already been made on them is the prevailing one when all return to their seats to see the curtain rise again. The professional critics have formed opinions, too, but have expressed them charily. They have chatted about the play between

the acts, but their verdict is a sealed one until published next day. Then it is found to be more or less of a disagreement.

Most of the serious plays nowadays are written in four acts, and the facetious pieces in three. The next to the final act is all-important. If that act is strongly successful, weakness in what has gone before or in what will come afterward may not cause a failure. At this juncture the opinion of the audience is given expression by applause, violent and prolonged, or feeble and brief, as the case may be. If a triumph has been won, the curtain is raised as many times as the audience demands it. The closing tableau is shown again, once or twice, sometimes with variations to form fresh pictures. After that the entire company is disclosed in a row, the principals in the centre; or else the actors pass in front of the lowered curtain. If there are more calls, the

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leading members go out without the others.

If there is a star, he or she now responds alone and is compelled to make a speech. The stage director decides who shall accept these compliments. Many are the jealous grievances that arise over questions of precedence. The author may be called for, also, but it is the actor who is thought of at the moment. The playwright is usually out of sight and out of mind. One of the first-night usages, that of passing flowers to the actresses, became an abuse, and is now abolished in the best-managed theatres. Floral pieces in unique designs got to be so big and numerous, and such an ado was made over them, that they were at length made fun of. These tributes were mostly from friends, but it came to be believed that the recipients paid for them. The general rule now is that flowers may be sent to the stage door privately or displayed





Drawn by Lucius Hitchcock.

CALLED BEFORE



THE CURTAIN.



in the public entrance, but not passed over the footlights.

Most of the men who write reviews of plays and acting are able and honest. Time was when favorable articles in certain journals were purchasable, but there is no such scandal now. This, that, or the other critic may have his whims and caprices, his likes and dislikes, and these feelings break out in his writings. But the average of judicial fairness is high. The writers are adequately paid by their employers, and as a rule they are left untrammelled in their honest judgments. Their work is done under hard conditions, and trained men only can do it with facility. The performance is never over before eleven o'clock; usually it lasts half an hour longer, and not infrequently drags along until twelve. As the "copy" must be in the office, three or four miles away, not later than one o'clock, there is a necessity for quick thought and

composition. Taking these difficulties into consideration, the quality of the reviews published next morning is surprisingly good. A second set of critics are those of the weekly and monthly periodicals. These are relieved of the stress of hurry, and some of them turn out admirable criticisms, while others, straining for singularity, are more readable than just.

The critics are influential with the public, but their judgment is not conclusive. If they were to combine to make a poor play succeed, or a good play fail, they could not do it. The most they could do would be to send people to the theatre or keep them away during the first week or so. After that the play would depend on itself. As a fact, any concert of action by the critics is unknown. It is not their custom to exchange views at the theatre. Their published opinions are in substantial unison when the play is of a

positive kind, but differ radically when it is of uncertain merit. They are farther apart in their estimates of the actor than of the playwright. They have their individualities, from the one too kindly to ever condemn without qualification, to the one too cross to ever praise without reserve. But, on the whole, their work builds up the best in the theatres and breaks down the worst.

Those of the critics who are to write for the next morning's journals quit the theatre hastily as soon as the play is over. Sometimes they have to leave without seeing the last act. Even those connected with evening papers pen their articles before going to bed, as the "copy" will be required early the next forenoon. Only the attachés of the weekly and monthly periodicals have leisure for lounging after the performance. It is the impression that the journalists congregate with the actors at that time. It is not so. Nor do they

get together a great deal at any time. Every critic has cherished friends on the stage, and more numerous casual acquaintances. But the critics keep apart generally from those whom it is their duty to write about. This does not arise from an assumption of superiority on the one hand or antipathy on the other. Perhaps it is not very brave in the journalist to avoid socially those whom he may be called on to condemn professionally. Some carry this so far that in many years of service they have never sat at the same table with an actor or manager, save at semi-public banquets. Others are free in their intercourse with people of the stage, and their geniality does not render them any the less impartial in their reviews.

The eagerness with which authors, managers, and actors read the criticisms the next day is natural enough. They may feel that they know more about what they have done than the writer

does, but his judgment is made known to thousands on thousands of people. The critics receive many letters of thanks, complaint, and explanation. But most of the persons, pleased or displeased, do not free their minds in that way. That there is an actor on earth who does not peruse the articles concerning him is past belief, and only here and there one makes any such pretence. An estimable and conspicuous actress said publicly that she never, never looked at anything printed about herself. Privately, on that very same day she wrote to a journalist to protest against something he had published.

However, the attitude of the majority is dignified in this matter. A minority send mutual friends to ask for kindness, employ so-called "press agents," and do not flinch at notoriety if they cannot have fame. The excuse put forward for such conduct is that publicity is the actor's breath of life.

Dion Boucicault once wrote to a critic: "Praise me if you can, but abuse me rather than let me alone." He once owned up to the authorship of a published letter violently assailing one of his own dramas. His aim was to stir up an interest. An eminent English actor and manager made a speech at a London dinner deploring the prying curiosity of newspaper reporters. The same mail containing his remarks brought letters from his own secretary to New York journals giving particulars of his personal doings.

## Points in First Performances



## XIV.

### POINTS IN FIRST PERFORMANCES.

THE best intentions of the author of a play may go astray in the first performance. The actors, unwittingly or wilfully, may disobey what the director has tried hardest to enforce at the rehearsals. The principal in a scene sets the pace for all concerned in it. The inclination generally is to speak too slowly. The idea is that "points" are made more strongly if dwelt on. But, if one drags in that way the rest are apt to do the same. If the first voice is pitched too low or too loud, the others take a wrong key from it. The actor

who thus offends may be "hogging the scene," as they say. He may change his attitudes and movements from what have been fixed upon, and so gain in conspicuousness. The hero may be ungallant enough to turn his own face toward the audience, and the heroine's away, even while declaring his unselfish love. He may contrive to trick the villain of the play out of his proper share in a dialogue at the very time that the mimic scoundrel is supposed to be the successful schemer. In the main, all the disobedience to previous instruction is a result of nervousness. As to the correct pitch of the voice, it is easy if the actor is accustomed to speaking in that particular theatre. But if he has been travelling the varying spaces and acoustic qualities bother him. It is usual to station a man at the rear of the gallery to report if the voices are too loud or too low.

One lesson learned by the actor in

the first public performance is when to wait for laughter or applause. His expectations do not accord with what really happens. A fiery speech may not rouse the audience after all. A remark meant to be comic may be regarded as merely foolish. In each case he pauses for the interrupting noise, and there is silence instead. But some things not counted on for much prove to be worth a great deal. Then, instead of waiting for the applause or laughter to cease, as he will in the future, he goes right along with the next sentence, and either does not make it heard or stops short and repeats it. The behavior of audiences, however, is not always the same. Lines and situations will vary in effect from night to night in the same theatre, though given in precisely the same manner. Different cities have different theatrical tastes, aside from any question of relative culture. A play may be performed quietly in one place and

require a louder and harsher delivery in the next.

The nervous tension among those engaged in the first performance of a new play is very great. The effect of it varies. What is called "stage-fright," a paralyzing terror of the audience, is prone to attack its victims on these occasions. It is not alone the novice who suffers from this ailment. Old stagers have it acutely, and sometimes unexpectedly. So great a genius as Edwin Booth said that he was never safe from a recurrence of "stage-fright" in rôles which he had played hundreds of times. As a rule, however, and almost always when the play has been prepared in the manner described in previous articles of this series, no finer representation is given than the first.

Do you wonder, when at the theatre, how much of the audience the actor can see? If the stage scene is dark, and the rest of the house less so, the people are

visible to him. But most of the time he is in a glare, from which he can discern little that is outside the row of footlights. It is like looking from bright sunlight into an unilluminated cavern. But he can hear all the noises that come from the gloom, and the faintest of them has a meaning to which he is keenly alert. The rustling of garments, the opening of fans, the shuffling of feet, the murmur of whispering, are signs that close attention is not being given. Silence is what he likes most of all, unless the scene is meant to be laughable. The noisiest of applause is not such proof of absorbing interest as unbroken silence affords. He is glad to be greeted upon his entrance. If he is a stranger, and there is at once a rattling of playbills to find his name, he is pleased that the people want to know who he is. A spontaneous burst of applause at a point of climax is grateful to his ears. But no tribute

that an actor receives is really higher than that which a rapt listener gives. His dread of ridicule is acute. None so well as he knows how short is the step from the sublime to the ridiculous. While keeping one ear wide open to polite sounds from the parquet he cocks the other at the gallery, whence ironical laughter may come at any moment.

There is one authenticated instance of a stage character being turned from earnestness into fun by the behavior of its first audience. It was done on the spur of the moment by an actress who had the rôle of an Egyptian princess. It was intended that she should be seriously and sentimentally impressive, while the star of the company could be contrastingly comical as the lover. But the audience would not have it so. Nor was it anything in the woman's appearance, for she was beautiful; nor in her acting, for it was clever, that made the people laugh. It came of a miscalcula-

tion by the author. The quick-witted actress, seeing that she could not control the audience, resolved to humor it. By an exaggeration of speech and manner she turned the part into burlesque, and it was acted in that way as long as the piece was played. Her conduct was insubordinate, of course, but she was not fined for it.

Some actors are disheartened by an audience's apathy or dislike. Others are incited to greater effort. Still others are noted for being bad "first-nighters" under any circumstances. They are dreaded by the other members of the company. Literal adherence to the language, as written and rehearsed, is impossible to these delinquents. They are often the best of artists, however, and so their lapses, incidental to a first performance, are condoned, though deplored. If the failure of memory cause the omission of cues, the next speakers are confused, and the audience knows

that something has gone wrong. But if the cues are spoken correctly and the language is altered and jumbled only in other portions, the author is anguished, because his meanings are left out and he alone will be blamed for the bad diction. Comedians in burlesques are charily permitted to put in impromptu jests.

But such "gagging" is forbidden, as a rule, under penalty of fines. It is prohibited absolutely in legitimate plays. If an actor get to varying the text or acquiring bad pronunciations, he is admonished by the stage manager. If he does not reform, a call is posted for a rehearsal on his account. Sometimes a whole company that has become lax is put through a "rehearsal for lines." In short, the prevalent idea that actors do about as they please in a performance, using their own judgment and changing words or action to suit their fancy, is, indeed, erroneous.

For an actor who cannot help his first-night faults and does not repeat them later there is pity instead of censure. The prompter is alert to help him out of his difficulties. The other players are quick to bridge over his lapses. Only the expert in the audience sees that they are having trouble with him. Some actors are ready and apt to aid him. In a tragedy a general should have given to his queen an impetuous account of a battle which he had won. But he stood wordless, silent, stuck fast; "You have come to tell me," she said, and then went on with the narrative which he should have spoken. Accidents will happen on the best-regulated first nights. There is a tradition of a play which had its third act blunderingly performed before the second, and it is further said that the same order was retained ever after, as it was an improvement. It is a fact that in the original representation of a comedy in

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Washington a false cue sent the chief actor on the stage at a wrong point. The result was that what should have been the last half of an act became the first. The stage manager let it go on, but by a bit of clever transposition saved the climax from being reached, before its time. There was a loss of coherence, but the audience did not know there was a mishap.

A rehearsal is always called for the next morning after the public representation. The practical value or worthlessness of all that has been done is at least indicated by the test with an audience. An immediate attempt is made to rectify errors. The entire play is not gone over, but only the portions requiring practice or alteration. Changes in dialogue or pantomime have to be repeated over and over, with all the care of the prior drilling, because they unsettle things. The meaning of certain scenes did not reach across the foot-

lights. They must have more emphasis. Others had a stronger effect than was desirable. They must be moderated. Still others were misunderstood. They must be cleared up in some way. There was laughter at a sober episode. The reason must be found and removed. There was no laughter at something meant to be comic. The fun must be forced. An actor failed to do what had been expected of him. He is taken to task mercilessly. If the play was a success, these after-rehearsals are easy. If it failed, they are hard.

It is now for the manager to decide whether to keep on with the play or drop it. The behavior of the first audience does not settle the question, as it does not prove that the more general public will be affected in the same way. The opinions of the critics are not conclusive, as they relate to the purely artistic side, rather than the popularity, of the entertainment. The manager

weighs both carefully, but is not guided altogether by them. He may recall, for instance, that some of the most long-lived of the rural dramas have been rejected absolutely by a *blasé* assemblage on the first night in New York, and were rated by some of the newspapers as poor literature. But it has prospered immensely. The manager is influenced most of all by the cash receipts. But whether the verdict be subsequently sustained or reversed, the opening night is over with.

## The Faces of the Players



## XV.

### THE FACES OF THE PLAYERS.

THE disguises put on by actors are sometimes very ingenious. Men who play eccentric parts must have skill of their own as caricaturists or else learn from some artist how to produce the requisite visage. The disguises do not stop with wigs and beards. An hour of careful work may be required to transform a pale, intellectual, amiable countenance to the red, brutish, and forbidding one of a bandit. The most usual change required is from a young man to an old man. Then the flesh tint is seldom ruddy, and in the case of extreme age it is white, tempered

slightly with blue or gray. This is applied over the entire face. The cheeks are touched with blue, and to the cheek-bones no color is applied. Wrinkles are usually made with the tint known as ox-blood, though sometimes blue or black is used. Bluish gray under the eyes adds years. Wrinkles are made on the brow after the actor has frowned, so that he may see where in his case they would naturally come. They are made about the mouth in the same way. The lines at the sides of the lower part of the nose are emphasised with bluish gray. The hands are made pale and crossed with wrinkles.

Beards are of two kinds: those the actor makes himself and those that come from the wigmaker. With the latter the actor has only to decide what he wants and give the order. If he undertakes the job himself, he buys crimped hair in the color he desires. That part of the face over which the beard is to

grow is smeared with adhesive wax, into which the hair is stuck, and afterward trimmed into the right shape. When the beard is supposed to grow very lightly over the upper cheeks and gradually thicken down to the chin the wig-maker's device of sewing the hair into a net will not answer. The actor must make such a beard on the spot. The upper part of it, where the hair is thin, is painted on with strokes of dark pink. Crimped hair and wax make mustaches and eyebrows as well as beards.

A common guide for the actor in making his face look as the assumed character requires it to, and especially to keep it so in the nightly repetitions, is to put up a picture of it beside the mirror in his dressing-room. This thing to work from may be a photograph of a real individual; or, in case the rôle is biographical, a printed likeness of a historic personage. Again, it may be an original study in colors for the pur-

pose. One actor had three such views made by a noted portrait painter, to show the full-face, a profile, and three-quarter visage desired.

Many actors devise ways to hide defects in their faces. One who played in tragedy had a turned-up nose, which unsuited him for his work, and he never appeared without a wax one. False noses are made of a kind of putty, light gray in color, and differing from other putty in being more adhesive. The actor fits this substance over his own nose, shapes it into the desired form, and colors it just as he would if the organ were natural. If the nose is to be of abnormal size, as in caricatures for farces and extravaganzas, wax is too heavy and is used only on the outside and at the edges of a pasteboard form. Oftener than audiences are aware of a versatile actor plays several minor rôles in the same piece. He has to disguise his appearance as well as his

voice and manner for each character. That makes hard work for him to do on his face.

Actors often have to make other than facial changes in their appearance. Pads of cotton or hair turn a lean figure into a fat one, but more comfortable falsity is constructed in wirework, or of inflated rubber shapes. Legs are increased in plumpness or improved in symmetry by means of skilfully thickened drawers, usually modelled by an expert theatrical hosier.

It is a mistaken idea that actresses are as a general rule handsomer on the stage than off. The reverse is as likely to be true. Nevertheless, all theatrical faces have to be painted. It may be assumed safely that none of the complexion is genuine. An exceptionally clear and pink skin may require no falsity, and a dark one may chance to suit the character to be assumed, but these exceptions to the rule are rare.

The glare of artificial light would make most faces ghastly white or unpleasantly sallow if bright hues were not laid on. The art of coloring a pretty visage just enough and not overdoing it is one which all actresses should learn. Many do not, and so we see beauty disfigured instead of enhanced. Others are very expert. There are two distinct processes. One makes use of colored powders applied dry, and the other mixes the same powders with grease, making a substance called grease paint. It comes in sticks, varying in size from a stick of shaving soap to a lead-pencil. It adheres like paint until washed off with vaseline or alcohol. The colors range in the flesh hues from the palest pink of a baby's face to the copper brown of an American Indian. Between these two every tint can be found.

The actress first covers her face with cold cream and rubs it into the pores, in order that none of the paint may get

into them and injure her own complexion. Next she takes a stick of grease paint of the flesh color which she has selected and dabs it on in four or five places. From these spots she rubs the stuff over the face until it presents an evenly colored skin. It is with the reds, blues, and black pencils that attempts to vary the features are made. The second step is usually to apply the red. If she is a brunette with dark hair and eyes, the tint is likely to be carmine. If she is a blonde, it will have more of a brick-dust hue. The stick is applied to the cheeks about the top of the cheek-bone. There the color is deepest. Then with the fingers it is spread over the first layer of grease paint. It is made lighter and lighter down to the jaws. Under each eye a blue line an eighth of an inch wide is drawn with a dark stick of the grease paint. This throws the eyes into relief. In the glare of the footlights they are dulled and lustreless. The

eyelashes are emphasized by blackening them with paint soft enough to adhere. If the eyebrows are not strongly marked, it is customary to darken them also. Close to the corners of the eyes small drops of bright red give an appearance of freshness and health. The ears are brushed with a hare's foot filled with dark flesh-colored powder. Sometimes bright red is used. The lips are reddened, more or less, with a carmine pigment.

A majority of the younger women of the stage use dry powders instead of grease paints. In this process the face is first rubbed all over with vaseline to protect the skin from injury. The powders are in various colors, corresponding to those of the paints. They are applied with a puff and blended with a hare's foot. The effect obtained is so similar to the one above described that to audiences there is no discernible difference. But the actress with grease



THE ARTIFICE OF BEAUTY.



on her face will say that the colors are deeper and more mellow than can be produced with powder. It is certain that an appearance of youthfulness can be obtained by it, and age concealed. There are face washes made in many tints of flesh color, exaggerated and deepened to suit the purposes of the theatre, and some actresses use them instead of either paint or powder. The preparation of a woman to look her best on the stage is little more than the heightening of color. The hands are merely whitened, as a rule, though the tips of the fingers are sometimes reddened a little. The arms and neck, if exposed by evening gowns, are tinted with powders, washes, and even with grease paints.

If an actress' features are irregular, she has to treat them specifically. If her nose is a pug or a turn-up, she draws a white line down its centre to the very tip end. On each side of this

line she lays on a light, bluish-gray tint. The effect of that is to lengthen the nose when the full face is seen. Of course, the illusion is lost when the profile is presented. If the cheeks are too plump, the lower halves of them are darkened. An imitation of youthfulness is helped by making the color very light just below the eyes. If the cheek-bones are high and the cheeks hollow below them, the former are whitened and the latter reddened. When an actress is called upon to "make up for a character part," which means preparing herself to represent an old or eccentric woman, her methods are much the same that men use under the same circumstances. Few young women on the stage like to look old. It is the struggle of every stage manager to make them conceal their youth even when the characters require it. They are apt to lose years as soon as his vigilance is relaxed.

## Behind the Scenes



## XVI.

### BEHIND THE SCENES.

It is easy to go behind the scenes of a theatre if you have any real business there. But it is hard to make a social call on a friend, and the merely curious stranger cannot get in at all. The doorkeeper of the stage is not less obdurate than the one at the public entrance of the house. He has no option to let other than employés pass him, and the most he can do for you is to deliver your card or verbal message to the stage manager, without whose permission no outsider may enter. This rule of exclusion is enforced in every

well-conducted theatre. It is a measure of both propriety and utility. Careless visitors might be indecorous, and they surely would be bothersome. So every applicant is referred to the stage manager, even if he comes by appointment with a leading actor.

The man at the door is a scowler and growler. He is as likely as not full of geniality, but he keeps it from showing itself in his face while on duty. He seems to be afraid that a smile with a "No" would make it a "Yes." He does not relax his severity of countenance even to the actresses as they arrive. If they bring along other companions than the privileged chaperone or maid-servant, the question of admission has to be settled as in the case of a stranger. The actresses come in street cars or carriages, in fine clothes or plain, according to taste and means. The actors present the same variety of appearance, from foppishness to shabbi-

ness. All examine the "call case" as they go in. That is a board in which notices of rehearsals and other things are posted. They also ask for their mail. Letters are delivered to them by the doorkeeper unless there is reason to think that they contain bad news. Telegrams are usually withheld for the same reason until the performance is over. This is done to guard against such a shock of ill tidings as might render the recipient unable to act. The players go at once to their dressing-rooms and prepare for the work of the evening.

The stage manager is expected to arrive at the theatre an hour before the time for the performance to begin. His first duty is to learn from the doorkeeper whether any member of the company has sent word of illness. Absentees are expected to let him know early in the day, but some one may have been disabled late, and in that case he arranges quickly for the necessary shift

of rôles. The system of under-study, as described in a previous chapter, may provide an easy way out of the difficulty. Possibly the substitute is in the house, or will be soon; but sometimes there is a skurry to fetch this person, or, in an extreme case, for some one to read a part from the manuscript.

All the actors should be in their dressing-rooms half an hour before the rise of the curtain. The call-boy raps at the doors and cries: "Half hour!" He gets a response in every case or reports his failure to do so. After the lapse of a quarter of an hour he makes another round with calls of "Fifteen minutes!" That is a precaution against tardiness in getting ready. A third time, when the orchestra is ready to begin its music, five minutes before the play should start, the lad's voice is heard again at the doorways with "Overture!" If there is a laggard, he tells the manager of it. The overture is

never permitted to begin until everybody who is to appear in the first scene is ready to do so, and the manager waits until sure of that before giving the signal to the leader of the musicians. In doing this he commonly uses a speaking-tube which connects the prompter's desk and the leader's stand. When the overture is near its end he goes to the centre of the stage and says, "Clear!" Thereupon everybody except the actors who are to be disclosed to the audience retires behind the scenes. Those who are left in sight take their proper positions. At the last note of the music, or at a given point if it is to last longer, the stage manager orders the curtain up. Formerly he struck a bell twice. The newer fashion is to do it noiselessly. He touches an electric button, a red lamp above the stage gleams, and the men up there raise the curtain.

The prompter is a man whose duty it is to follow the words of the play in

his book as they are spoken, and be quick to give them, in an undertone, to any actor whose memory fails. He has a desk at the front right corner of the stage, just out of the audience's range of vision. It is from there that the lights are controlled and the electric signals sent the operatives aloft. In practice he is here, there, and everywhere, book in hand, and at the same time seeing that others do their duties. The stage manager may act a part in the play, and in that case the work of these two men is mixed up. So, for the purposes of this paragraph, the one of them who literally keeps things going will be called the foreman of the job.

This foreman of the work is held to account if the scene has not been set properly, with every piece of furniture or other object in its right place. If the incidental music is played behind the scenes, he starts and stops it at the right instants.

He is responsible for all the other noises made off the scene and all the changes of lights. If horses are to be introduced, he makes sure that they are mounted or harnessed in readiness. If the stage is small, that may be done in an alleyway outside and a signal given to the leader when to enter. If a meal is to be eaten, the cold tea or ginger ale which represent still or sparkling wines, and the slices of bread or cake that purport to be meats, must be prepared. But of late realism has invaded this feature of plays. Coffee smoking as it is poured and roast turkeys steaming on their platters must be done to a turn as though for a repast in real life. The preparation of these things devolves on the property man, but the "foreman" has to keep a sharp eye on them, too. Little of the food in stage meals is eaten. It is not easy to talk with a full mouth. In several of the recent rural plays, however, stress is laid on the

voracity of some of the characters at table. One has a Thanksgiving dinner, another a Christmas feast, and another a donation party. The test has often been made whether a man can eat a quail every day for a month. It is said that no one has ever been able to do it. Actors have had a similar difficulty with turkey in the New England pieces. Too much of a good thing brought satiety. For that reason the voracious eater in one such scene had to be changed several times in a season.

Fun-loving students in a college town or some local military company may have been engaged to appear in certain dramas, and they require especially close control. Soldiers of the United States Army are hired for such purposes, when available, and they are more amenable to discipline. If a few of them need to represent many, they are marched repeatedly past the point of view, and beards are sometimes

clapped hastily on several to make a change for the reappearances. The "captain of the supers," who has immediate charge of those things, usually requires higher supervision. It will be seen that the stage manager, the prompter, or the two combined in one man, is quite as active while the curtain is up as any of the visible performers. About a minute and a half before the end of the act he signals to a stage hand in charge of the curtain to be ready to lower it.

While the audience at a theatre is lazily, perhaps impatiently, killing time between the acts, hard and fast work is being done behind the lowered curtain. The interval is shortened as much as possible, and the prompter makes a record of it every night. If there is undue slowness, the manager has something positive to say about it. The instant that all the encores have been responded to the actors skurry to their

dressing-rooms to prepare for the next act. "Strike!" says the stage manager. Men numbering from six to a dozen, or more if the scenery is heavy and elaborate, remove that which has just been used and put another set into place. They wear cloth slippers, so that their footsteps may not be heard by the audience. They do not talk, save in undertones. They are rapid and systematic. Every separate piece of the scene is marked to show where it belongs. Practice has made the handlers familiar, and there is no confusion. Walls or trees are slid into place and fastened with adjustable braces, roofs and skies are lowered from above, and if there is a landscape at the rear, it is let down. Then the furniture, fences, and what not are located by marks on the floor.

An ordinary shift of scenery can be made in about seven minutes. An intricate one, in spite of the utmost celerity and the assignment of each man

to do certain things only, may require a quarter of an hour. A plain, square room, or an outdoor view in which everything is painted on flat canvas, can be set in five minutes. But with them there is no hurry, as an intermission longer than that is usually required by the actors for changing their costumes. Some of the scenery that is fine art in drawing and coloring consists almost altogether of canvas, which can be let down into place quickly. But American managers like substantial reality. If a tree is to be climbed, a wall vaulted, a stairway mounted, or a post leaned against, those things are now usually solid. Their use consumes time in the handling. Everybody not engaged in the work is excluded from the stage while the scenes are being changed. The call-boy makes a round just before all is ready. This time he cries, "Second act!"

Some of the best impressions are

made upon an audience by things heard and not seen, but they would not have such an effect if their methods were exposed to view. The comic man in a farce stumbles out of the room with an armful of crockery, and crash after crash follows. The laughter is not caused so much by seeing his exit as by imagining his fall downstairs, with the broken dishes flying in all directions. There would be hardly a snicker if he could be seen standing quietly aside, while the noise of his imaginary mishap is made by dropping a basket of old crockery on the floor as many times as it is desirable to prolong the supposed accident. When in a melodrama a storm rages outside the house, with dashes of rain and flashes of lightning shown at the window, with the sound of a high wind sweeping by, and with thunder reverberating in the distance, a scene of tremendous tempest is conjured up. It would not do to set the walls aside



THUNDER-MAKING DEVICES.



IMITATING RAIN.



MAKING LIGHTNING.



HOW WIND IS IMITATED.



and let the people see how those sights and sounds are made. The noise of wind and rain come from a cylinder of silk which, when turned with a crank, draws the cloth rapidly over the wooden flanges. The imitation is perfect.

It is often essential that the arrival of personages in a play in carriages or on horseback shall be heard before they are seen. The rumbling of wheels, from the light ones of a phaëton to the heavy ones of a cannon, is imitated with a small vehicle which looks like a railway freight car in miniature and is run along a wooden track. This car is left empty or laden with weights to suit the immediate purpose. Just the requisite noise is sometimes produced by using oblong wheels or cutting sections out of those that are round. The clatter of horses' hoofs is simulated by a man striking with wood or metal hand-pieces on a hard or soft surface. Single shots by gun or pistol are not counterfeit.

But for volleys of musketry or heavy cannonading the smoke of gunpowder proved objectionable, as it obscured the scene and choked the audience. The invention of smokeless powder was therefore a good thing for mimic as well as actual battles. But in plays where loudness is not desired a blow on a bass drum represents the discharge of a cannon, and rapid strokes with rattans on a dried calfskin, a volley of rifles.

The working of these devices is ordinarily left to the stage hands, but it sometimes happens that the actors will themselves perform this duty if it is connected with their own rôles, in order to guard against blunders. For the same reason they are willing to make the murmurs and cries outside in case the invisibility of the mob throughout the play does not require accessory performers. These voices off the scene have to be regulated to a nicety. If they are supposed to come from a dis-

tance, the shouters or singers are placed in a room with the door left open.

The lighting of a stage is of prime importance. It is an art in itself. Electricity has generally taken the place of gas for that purpose. A complete modern outfit includes three rows of footlights across the front, shaded from the audience. Reflectors throw the illumination on the scenes strongly when desired. One row is in colorless bulbs, one is in red and one in blue. They are used separately or in combination. Over the stage are three to five adjustable rows of border lamps, arranged to be raised or lowered to fit the scenery, but always screened from the front. Just behind the side edges of the stage opening are other lines of them. The entire number reaches three hundred in a well-appointed house. All are connected by wires with a keyboard at the prompter's desk. A bunch light is a cluster of seven to thirty electric

bulbs on a standard with a polished reflector behind them, like the beacon of a locomotive, and a holder for sheets of colored gelatine in front. These bunch lights are set wherever needed. If a still stronger glare is to be thrown, a calcium light, consisting of a piece of calcium burning in combined jets of hydrogen and oxygen, is used. Two gas cylinders and a man to operate them render this apparatus expensive. Nearly as good results can be obtained from an electric arc light placed in a box open at the front and mounted on a tripod.

In the practical working of all the lights the original designs of the scenic artist are adhered to more or less faithfully. The effect of moonlight is gained with either no gelatine shade or with light blue. Various kinds of sunlight require yellow or amber mediums. Firelight calls for red. In the case of a conflagration the red glows are in-

creased by throwing the lights on clouds of steam emitted from pipes. There may be flashes of the same kind of red fire that the boys set off on Fourth of July nights. Actual flames are blown from a torch with a hand-bellows, but for safety's sake they are used as little as possible. At the other extreme of illumination in a play are scenes so dark that the figures moving in them are barely discernible.

Stage lightning used to be produced by burning magnesium, just as the amateur photographers do in making flashlight pictures. A simpler and better way, in theatres with an electric outfit, is to touch an ordinary file at the end of one wire to a bit of carbon at the end of another wire. The carbon burns brightly during the contact, which may be a mere touch or prolonged with the requisite irregularity by rubbing the ignited substance along the rough steel. The appearance of falling rain is caused

by suspending many fine, polished wires and vibrating them in a strong light thrown from behind. That is an excellent illusion for a moment, but betrays itself if continued too long. Snow is bits of paper shaken down gently from above. The time-honored thunder-maker is a big sheet of thin iron suspended by a cord shaken hard or gently, long or briefly, according to the requirements of the particular storm in progress. A newer and better thunder machine is a long, narrow trough with a heavy cannon ball rolling in it. Wooden cleats impede the ball along the way, and it may be rolled very fast for a loud peal or slowly for a long rumble. This trough is placed as high as possible over the stage, and sometimes it extends over the auditorium. The imitation surpasses the real thing if a story told by stage managers is true. At a rehearsal of the storm scene in Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" the trage-

dian, Edwin Forrest, was asked: "How was that peal of thunder?"

"Not a bit like the real thing," he replied testily; "you must do better than that."

"Oh, we can," said the manager. "But there happens to be a thunder-storm outside, and that clap was the real thing."



## The Actors Among Themselves



## XVII.

### THE ACTORS AMONG THEMSELVES.

THE theatrical green room of history and tradition for the common use of the players is becoming a thing of the past. It is provided in few theatres of modern build. But if that gathering place is lacking, there is a compensation in the dressing-rooms. These are still miserable little coops in the poorer theatres throughout the country. The worst of them are damp, down cellar, or inconvenient; away upstairs, devoid of comforts, and scant in necessities. But a great change for the better has been wrought in the best of the new houses. The quarters in them may be small and none too easily accessible,

but they are cleanly kept, adequately furnished, and sometimes the luxuries include bathrooms. All gaslights are enclosed in wire as a safeguard against fire—that greatest of theatrical terrors. A good-sized mirror and a dressing-table are the other invariable objects. The men's rooms and the women's are usually at opposite sides of the stage. If the theatre is being occupied by one company for a long engagement, the rooms are furnished and decorated by the occupants as they please. Homelike and often luxurious boudoirs are thus made by the women, and sometimes quite modish "bachelor apartments" by the men. Trunks are displaced by wardrobes, pictures are on the walls, and the whole aspect of things is extremely unlike the wayside booths of strolling players in olden times.

There is much barrenness still in the theatres visited by the travelling companies, though there has been a general

improvement of the rooms, and many actresses carry along a few decorative little things to relieve their homesickness. If there is a star in the company, he or she has the largest room. If there is none on the stage level, one is sometimes made of canvas. If there is no star, the leading actress has the first choice and the leading actor the second. If it happens that two members of the company are of the same professional grade, the question of rooms becomes troublesome, and the stage manager has to settle it as best he may. A common way out of that dilemma is to construct in a corner of the stage a temporary room of canvas. Such a place may, by its handiness, be more desirable than the best of those that are upstairs or down cellar. He assigns the others about as he pleases, and frequently has to put two or three in one room, or a score if the play employs a large number of minor people.

Between the acts most of the actors are busy in their dressing-rooms. The costumes may have to be changed, and years added to the face and the hair of a man. Valets are frequently employed to keep a man's wardrobe in order, get out the right garments at the right time, and help in putting them on and taking them off. Stars nearly always indulge themselves in these servitors, who are sometimes utilized as silent figures in the play, or even speakers of a few lines. The same economical method is also applied to maids for the actresses, who may have to make hasty changes of costume—to finish in ten minutes a toilette which would occupy a fashionable belle in private life an hour. The nimble assistant works while her mistress does too. Thus, four deft hands are moving at once, and without interfering with one another, owing to calm method in what sometimes looks like a mad rush.

The maid has laid out the gown that is to be put on, with all its accessories. The dresses are made with a view to celerity. Hardly anything is left to be fastened on. Knots of ribbon, draped sashes, pieces of jewelry, even corsage bouquets, are attached beforehand, in case there is not a minute to spare. A very modish and complete evening gown with everything belonging to it may be a single construction. The maid inspects it carefully to see that it is in complete good order, and deposits it on a chair. Close by she places the shoes, stockings, and whatever of millinery is to be worn. When the actress comes in she is deftly relieved of the gown which the audience has last seen her in. Next she sits before her mirror, and, if there is need of great haste, makes whatever rearrangement of hair or headdress is necessary while the maid takes off the shoes and stockings. Under the latter are different ones already on. By the

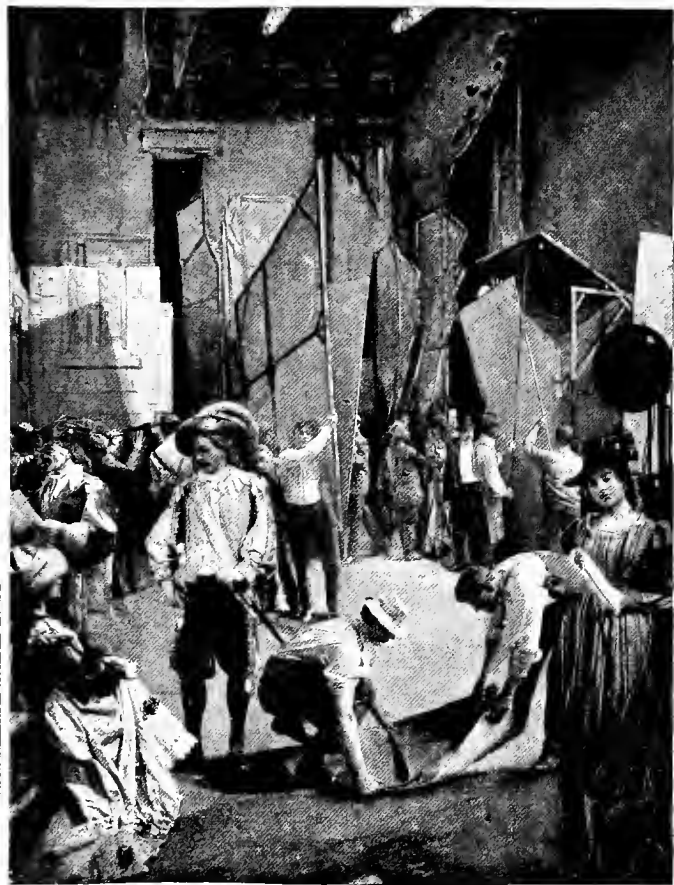
time that the second pair of shoes are buttoned the coiffure is readjusted. Then the actress stands up, and the new dress is adjusted in a jiffy. If the change has had to be made while an act is in progress, it may have occupied no more than five or six minutes. But that is exceptional. If done between acts, with ten minutes allowed to it, the job has no appearance of furious speed, so thoroughly is it prearranged.

If an actress is on a tour, and her rôle necessitates many or delicate costumes, the care of them is a difficult task. Theatrical trunks full of drawers or a complexity of other compartments are in the market. But they are not generally favored. Each gown is laid in a big enough tray to hold it without squeezing, and is tied in place with tapes to keep it from rumpling. A compartment is provided for every hat, and these are made of the right sizes and shapes. An actress is permitted to

have as many trunks as her stage wardrobe will fill, and one other for private use. That she keeps at her hotel. If she wants more than one for the latter purpose, she must herself pay for the extra transportation, unless she is of sufficient consequence to get a special concession in her contract. It is only the more prosperous who can afford to employ a maid for her exclusive service. The others help themselves or one another, or club together to bear the expenses of a dresser. Sometimes the manager pays the wages. Those points are settled according to circumstances. If the play has a large number of minor actresses, such as a chorus in a comic opera, or a ballet in a burlesque, their costumes are provided by the manager and taken care of by a wardrobe mistress. She packs and unpacks them, sees to it that they are kept in good condition, refits them to new members of the company, and is held to a strict

account of them. She directs the donning and doffing of them, and in some cases is a very busy and even exacting boss.

Much of the time while a play is in progress some of the performers are just out of sight behind the scenes, listening alertly for their entrance cues. Their behavior is of all sorts. Some are as calm as though about to saw wood or knead dough, while others are contrastingly nervous, and these may be seen pacing to and fro, mumbling the words they are about to speak, and keying themselves up to the right pitch of assumed emotion. That is called "pumping up emotion." Two dead and gone tragedians used to illustrate this point. John McCullough had to rouse himself. In "The Gladiator" his turbulent appearance in the arena was always preceded by a minute or two of almost as vigorous action behind the scene. Edwin Booth required no such



BEHIND THE CURTAIN.



excitement. Even in the wife-murdering episode of "Othello" his jealous frenzy gave no sign until he was before the audience. The conduct of stars in intercourse with their companies is diverse, too. Some are distant, haughty, and keep aloof. Others are companionable. No actor of any grade is oblivious of the audience. If he professes an indifference, it is a false pretence. How many, many years has Joseph Jefferson played in "Rip Van Winkle"? Yet he will tell you that if the people are not silently intent in pathetic moments, or do not laugh as much as usual at the comic points, he is genuinely alarmed at once. He feels that the fault is his own and seeks to remedy it. There is a peephole at the prompter's side of the stage, and sometimes one at the opposite side also, through which the audience may be watched by any one anxious as to its character or behavior.

In the idle spells of a play the actors

chat in their rooms, read books, magazines, and newspapers, play games of cards, do needlework if they are women, and perhaps indulge in forbidden smokes behind a locked door if they are men. To some of them acting is an utterly unemotional task. Others feel all that they express. There seems to be no choice between these different artists as to the merits of their work and no settled rule as to those things. It is no doubt true, however, that women are likelier than men to act with genuine emotion.

It is in the contracts between managers and actors that the latter may be punished by fine or dismissal for breaking the rules of the theatre or company. The stage manager is usually empowered to impose fines at his discretion. In ordinary practice they are exacted from players who are behind time in getting to rehearsals or performances, for varying the words or action of his

part from what has been settled upon at rehearsal, for noisiness behind the scenes, and for any conduct unbecoming in a lady or gentleman. The amount of the fine ranges between \$1 and \$5, and the amount is taken from the offender's wages at the end of the week, to be retained by the manager.

However, few fines are really collected. Expostulation seldom fails, and when it does discharge follows. Such is the custom with two of the famous stock companies. On the other hand, the third company of equal celebrity, now disbanded, was always governed imperiously. The rules were numerous, and every infraction meant a penalty. The players could not make complaint to the manager personally. They had to write to him, and if he wished to discuss the matter, he appointed an interview in his private office. Among the forbidden acts punishable by fines running as high as a week's salary or

by dismissal were absence from the city without permission, even when not engaged in the current play; doing anything toward the publication of facts about what is being done in the theatre or is to be done; surreptitiously copying any part of a play; gossiping disagreeably about members of the company or the manager; making fun of another performer while on the stage; addressing the audience unless directed to do so; and by any misconduct causing injury to the reputation of himself, herself, the manager, or any member of the company. Most of the stage rules of the other leading managers merely call for good behavior personally while in the theatre and strict attention to duties professionally.

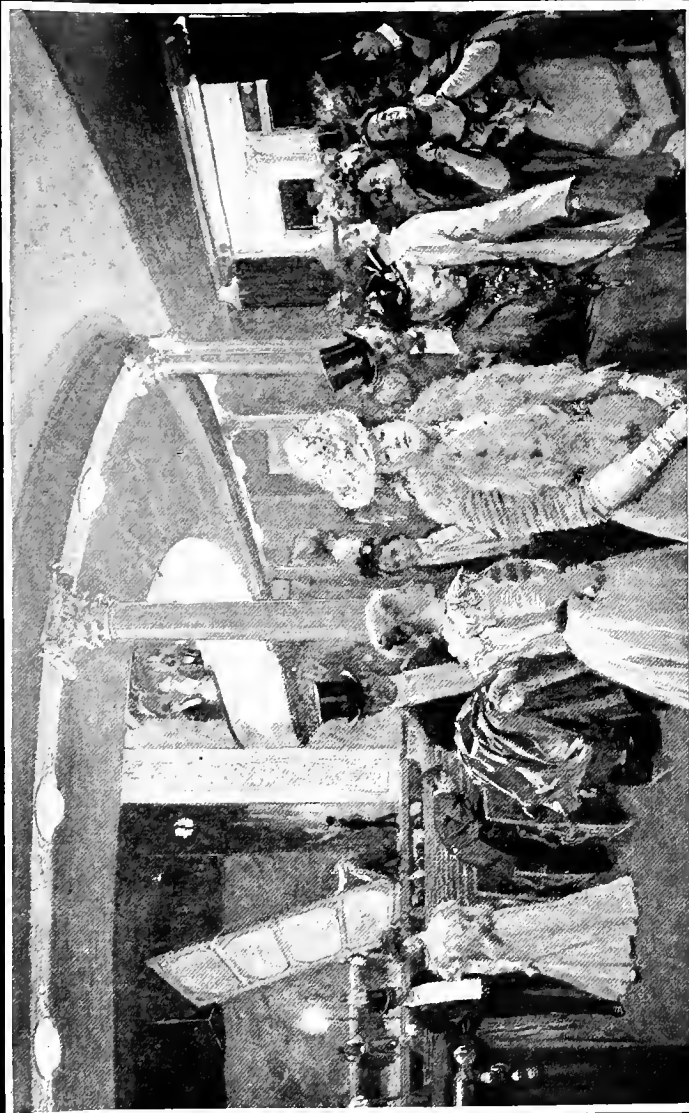
Social relations behind the scenes are as various as anywhere else. Love and hatred, harmony and jealousy, amiability and disagreeableness—all the characteristics of life elsewhere exist just

the same in stageland. It is a fact, however, that an atmosphere of pretence extends from the mimic scenes to the spaces behind them—that is to say, the actor is inclined to seem more polite than he feels. It is so among other people, true enough; but the amenities of intercourse among the players overlay a vast deal of professional animosity. Thus the ardent sweethearts of fiction may be uncongenial in fact, the fond mother may secretly despise her son, and the dutiful daughter may not be on speaking terms with her father. But have there not been dissensions in the sweetest-toned church choirs? It may be said that theatrical companies get along together as well as classes in colleges or sets of clerks in stores.

Some managers still hold to the idea that husbands and wives are less desirable than bachelors and maidens in the rôles of lovers. That is a reason why

marriages in stageland are sometimes kept a secret from the public, and why many actresses do not wed at all. The old idea that wives and husbands should not be sweethearts in plays is held by some wedded couples, who, therefore, play in separate companies. But experience has proven that it is, after all, a mistake to believe that the effect of mimic courtship is lost when the audience knows that the lovers are in reality husband and wife. The fact is pertinent, as bearing on this question, that leading actors extremely popular in New York as exponents of love, those noted as *matinée* idols of the girls, are husbands, and that some of the most adored actresses are equally well known to be wives.

After the fall of the curtain at the end of the play the performers like to get out of their paint and costumes and into every-day guise as soon as possible. Under ordinary circumstances, they



Drawn by R. J. Rosenmeyer.

THE LAST NIGHT OF AN ENGAGEMENT.



quit the theatre within fifteen minutes, but sometimes they are delayed. If they are engaged in a new play, and the manager wishes to get up some pictures for advertising purposes, they may have to remain to pose before a camera. For separate portraits they may go to the photographer's gallery in the daytime. But groups in scenes are taken by flashlight on the stage. The photographs may afterward be duplicated and displayed in frames or multiplied by lithography for street posters.

With the travelling companies there is some commotion on the opening night in each city, and much more on the closing night. In the former case the assignment of dressing-rooms, the unpacking of wardrobes, and the adjustment of scenery on the stage cause friction before the performance begins. In the latter case the excitement follows the final presentation of the play. Trunks and boxes are filled with costumes and

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properties, scenery is taken apart and folded, and all the material has to be put on wagons and taken to a railway station. The quantity varies, of course. One truck-load of trunks and boxes and one of scenery suffice for nine companies out of ten. These can be packed in a single baggage car, but a heavily outfitted melodrama or a spectacular piece is pretty sure to fill two or three cars. In case a number of plays are taken along, a special train of fifty-foot cars, instead of the ordinary forty-footers, has to be used. But that is a rare occurrence. So is a special passenger train for the actors, except when no regular one will answer the purpose of reaching the next city in time. Often the start has to be made right after a performance. The company is adjured not to miss the train. A list of half a dozen hotels and boarding-houses in the next city on the route, with their prices, is bulletined. The

actors have to pay their own board, and it is their privilege to choose between extravagance and thrift. Some can afford to live in the best hotels. Others must take up with the cheapest boarding-houses.

But this book has already told all that the writer knows about the prosperities and privations, the successes and failures, the joys and sorrows of "The Theatre and Its People."

THE END.













